

## The Bloodsucking Brady Bunch by ChangeTheCircumstances

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Canon-Typical Violence going along with the movie so rated R type violence, F/M, Family Angst, Family Drama, Friendship, Gen, Joyce adopted Steve, M/M, The Lost Boys (1987) - Freeform, The Lost Boys AU, Vampire AU, still the 80s

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Billy Hargrove, Carol (Stranger Things), Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Nancy Wheeler, Neil Hargrove, Steve Harrington, Tommy H. (Stranger Things), Will Byers, others mentioned - Character

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield & Nancy Wheeler, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers & Joyce Byers & Will Byers & Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers/Nancy Wheeler

**Status:** Completed

**Published:** 2018-01-02

**Updated:** 2018-01-30

**Packaged:** 2022-04-20 16:34:11

**Rating:** Mature

**Warnings:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence

**Chapters:** 5

**Words:** 36,031

**Publisher:** archiveofourown.org

**Summary:**

Steve moves with the Byers to Santa Carla, the Murder Capital of the world. The nickname certainly raises a lot of questions but he doesn't fight it and he doesn't argue. Joyce has been through enough. They all have. All they want is to continue their lives as a normal family.

# 1. Welcome to Santa Carla

## Author's Note:

So this idea has been spinning in my head and I couldn't help myself. The plot will be different from the movie in some areas and I'm not including all the *Stranger Things* characters because I didn't want to make it too convoluted but I hope you enjoy! The plan is six chapters but that could change.

Steve jolted awake as “Should I Stay Or Should I Go” suddenly blasted from the speakers. “Alright,” he groaned, “who let Jonathan take control of the radio?”

“Hey! I like this song too!” pouted Will from Steve’s right.

Steve just rolled his eyes, looking out and realizing it was suddenly day time. “How long was I out?”

“Don’t feel too bad sweetheart,” Joyce said from the front seat. “The boys just woke up too.”

“You’ve been driving the whole night? I said I could take over,” sighed Steve.

“And I told you I would be fine. It isn’t my first all-nighter,” Joyce replied, smiling at him through the rearview mirror. “I’ll need to stop and get some gas before we finally make it. How about the boardwalk? You kids can find something to eat, get a feel for the area. Just remember to stick together.”

“Will do mom,” replied Jonathan.

Steve stretched, Jonathan’s mix-tape playing on as they drove down the interstate. It took about thirty more minutes before they spotted the sign for Santa Carla. Steve watched it fly by, his eye catching the graffiti on the other side. His brow furrowed as he looked over to Joyce. He thought about saying something but forced himself to stop. After what she’d been through, after what they’d all been through,

they really didn't need to bring something like that up.

Still, the graffiti festered in the back of his mind as they went down a ramp and into the city. It wasn't exactly Steve's crowd, or really any of theirs. So much damn leather and piercings and Steve was pretty sure the majority of the people were under twenty-five and anyone who wasn't looked to be over fifty and on crack. The entire city couldn't be like this and Steve had an even harder time of imagining Joyce growing up here but it was all they had. No point in complaining.

Steve and Jonathan held onto Will like someone was going to sweep in and fly him away. They went by three different places for popsicles before they found one that looked at least semi-professional. By the time they got back to the car, Joyce had filled it up, cleaned off the top, and bought them all cokes. "You boys ready?"

"Sure thing mom," Jonathan replied. They quickly finished their pops and threw away the sticks before jumping in.

Once away from the boardwalk, the city didn't look quite as punk and dystopian but the downfall was that it felt kind of empty. It seemed like the boardwalk was just the place to go. They continued to go through and past it, eventually turning down a country road. The car bumped along the gravel and up the hill. Steve looked back and saw the city behind them. They weren't in the middle of nowhere but it still felt oddly isolating. They'd passed maybe two houses before they stopped at an old gate. Jonathan jumped out and pulled it open.

Steve could tell that the place's farming days were long gone, the remnants of it scattered across the property until they finally arrived at the house itself.

"Didn't grandpa have a horse?" asked Will.

"Someone took him when grandpa passed," Joyce replied. "I could probably try to find who took him but there should be a horse farm around here if you just want to see one."

"That would be cool," Will smiled.

“Did you go horseback riding when you were younger?” asked Steve.

“Sometimes, but I was never very good at it,” Joyce smiled. “Let’s check out the house before we start unloading the boxes.”

Steve jumped out of the car and walked into the dusty place. Considering Joyce’s dad had passed away four years ago, Steve had expected the place to be more empty. There were actually a fair few things around, books and maps and so many damn animals that were stuffed and perched everywhere. There was still a couch in the living room and a dining room table, even if both were incredibly dusty.

“It has...atmosphere,” Jonathan finally got out.

Steve rolled his eyes. “That’s one word for it.”

“There’s no TV!” Will called out as he walked through two more rooms.

“Grandpa never did get cable,” Joyce called back.

Will let out a tired groan but he didn’t actually complain. It didn’t matter that he was thirteen. He knew just as well as Jonathan and Steve how hard this had been on Joyce and the family in general. They’d just have to deal with what they had.

After checking the upstairs and mercifully finding enough empty rooms for everyone, they headed back down and grabbed the boxes. Steve got the ones marked living room and kitchen and then grabbed his own, quickly going up to his new room. His and Jonathan’s didn’t have beds in them so he laid out his comforter and pillow on the side. He stared at the rest of the box, the nine pairs of clothes, spare tennis-shoes, and books that he’d never given back from past classes. There was one empty notebook, two photos, and that was it.

One was of him and his real parents, the other with the Byers. He let out a small, sad sigh and placed them both to the side. If he managed to get a desk, he’d put them both on it.

There were actually some hangers in the closet, and a stuffed beaver, so he put up his clothes, turned the beaver around so it wouldn’t be staring at him the next time he opened it up, and headed back

downstairs. Jonathan was already down and Steve quickly helped him finish with what kitchen appliances they had.

Steve glanced over at him. Even after living with the guy for six years, it was still such a rare thing to see him fully smile and right now he had even less reason to.

“You doing ok?”

“I should be asking you that.”

“Why me?” frowned Steve.

“You actually liked the school we were at. You were popular, on the basketball team. People actually missed you when you said you were leaving.”

“They’ll still forget about me in a month’s time,” sighed Steve. “And hey, you were making a name at the local paper with some of your photos. Surely it was hard leaving that behind.”

Jonathan just gave a slight nod. The twitch of his lips was the only sign that it really hurt.

“I just...tell me if you need anything.”

“Again, I don’t understand why you’re asking me,” sighed Jonathan. “The moment you joined the family, dad finally found his favorite son.”

Steve flinched. “I didn’t—”

“I’m not...trying to accuse you Steve. You know that right?”

“Yeah...yeah of course! I know you better than that. I’m just not sure what you’re trying to get at.”

Jonathan finally smiled, if only a bit. “You were just what Lonnie imagined a son should be. You actually liked sports like him. You focused more on basketball than taking pictures or drawing. You’re part of the family Steve and he definitely was more of a dad to you than me.”

Steve shook his head and slugged Jonathan in the shoulder. "I don't care how much Lonnie and I got along. The moment I got older and realized how he hurt Joyce and isolated you two...Lonnie may have taken me to basketball games, but he wasn't the one who slept next to me after...well you know. He wasn't the one that drove me to school and helped me with homework. I'm glad Joyce divorced him."

Jonathan raised an eyebrow, clearly catching the slight break in Steve's voice. There was really nothing Steve could hide from him.

"I did...I had hoped...in some ways he did make me think of dad," admitted Steve after a pause.

"You have us though," Jonathan murmured, placing a hand on Steve's arm.

"I do," Steve softly agreed, "and you guys are more than enough. I repeat. Screw Lonnie. I'm happy I'm here with you."

"Me too."

Just then, Will rushed into the room. "Have you unpacked the kitchen stuff?"

They both nodded.

"Mom wants you two to see if the electricity still works here. The breaker should be outside but she can't remember for sure."

"It'll be a good idea to know if the fridge works too," Steve nodded. "Where's Joyce?"

"Mom's in the attic. She's seeing if there's anything useful but apparently it's really crowded so she asked us to stay out of it for now," Will replied.

"Thanks," said Jonathan. "I'll look on the west side of the house and you the east?"

"Sounds good. Will, if you find the breaker box inside, yell at us will you?" asked Steve.

Will nodded and the three split up. The entire afternoon was like that, making sure things worked, trying to organize what they had, clean a little here and there. They weren't even done by nightfall as Joyce finally came down from the attic, dusting off her pants. "I know we don't have much so how about we go into town again? If I'm remembering things right, the boardwalk really comes alive at night."

Steve eagerly agreed to that, his stomach already turning as he thought of what little food they had left over from the move: the three boxes of C-3PO's Cereal, dried out tangerines, and two cans of beans.

They unhooked the trailer to the car and got in, heading back down the long, gravelly path into the city.

Even on the outskirts, Steve could tell Santa Carla truly came alive at night rather than the day. From the gravel path, the lights flashed and danced about, making the place look like a small island in the dark. Once in the city, Steve felt like the population had tripled and he felt even more out of place. He thought about the small town he'd grown up in, had lived his entire life in until now. God, what was high school going to be like here? Steve didn't even want to think about it, looking at the flashing lights and array of colors that would have never showed up in their small town.

They parked and started to walk around, eventually finding a small burger shop that was practically overrun with people. Steve couldn't tell if it was because the food was good or just cheap.

When they finally got their order, Joyce said, "After this I'm going to start looking for a job in the area. You boys can see the sights if you like and we can meet back at the car in an hour."

One look at Jonathan and Will and it was obvious they all knew what Joyce was trying to do. She was trying to keep them distracted, trying to make it seem like their situation wasn't as bad as it was. Granted, it could be worse. They had a house after all and some money from the settlement but it certainly wasn't enough for four people to float on.

When Steve caught Jonathan's slight nod, Steve quickly said, "We were thinking of getting jobs—"

"No. Absolutely not."

Steve frowned. "But Joyce—"

"No. You're both seventeen and in a brand new city. You should be focusing on something fun. Not my troubles."

Jonathan reached forward. "Mom—"

"Enjoy tonight," Joyce repeated, the stress breaking across her face. The reality of driving a car all night finally appeared under her eyes along with every other tireless night dealing with bills and paperwork and fucking Lonnie. "For me, please? I want to hear some utterly wild tales on the drive back home."

Steve figuratively stepped back. He and Jonathan had both talked about needing to do something, anything to make it easier on his mom but of course Joyce wouldn't have any of it. And yeah, they had to remind themselves that Will couldn't just be left alone for ages at a time because everyone was at work. That wasn't fair to him but they had to do something.

Obviously that conversation wasn't for tonight though and Steve and Jonathan relented. Joyce left first and not long after Will finished his last fry. They threw away their trash and quickly moved into the throng of people. Steve kept an eye on Will at all times but did slowly find himself enjoying the place, if only because of how utterly insane and unfamiliar it was.

There were tons of shops filled to the brim with random knickknacks and odd themes. There were tattoo parlors and bars, tourist and voodoo stores. Crap food vendors littered the area, mixed in with carnival style games. It was like having a culture shock.

Music could be heard blaring from speakers and out in the distance like there was a concert going on somewhere. There were also the musicians simply on the boardwalk, making the area have a unique, jumbled up noise that was impossible to individually tell what came



from what.

Steve noted when Jonathan's eye caught an art vendor of photography. Rolling his eyes, he ruffled Will's hair and said, "Don't worry. We'll find something else if you want to chill out here."

Jonathan bit his lip, clearly uncertain about abandoning them both but Steve waved him away.

"We're supposed to be having fun, remember? Have fun. We'll meet you at the car if we don't run into each other again," grinned Steve, putting a hand on Will's back and guiding him away. "So, got any idea about what would peak your interest here?"

Will's brow furrowed in concentration as he tried to come up with an answer. "Probably...comics."

"Well there's got to be something like that around here. Come on."

They slowly made their way down the boardwalk until they spotted a large, open comic book store. The owner sat smoking in the front and Steve waved a hand to clear the air as Will rushed forward, his eyes bright with excitement. Steve double checked to see if there were any other ways out of the store and upon finding none, decided to wait near the entrance until Will was satisfied.

For a while, Steve just people watched. He wasn't artsy like Jonathan or Will so it wasn't like he could do much with what he saw but it was still fun, trying to find anything he could connect to with the people around him. Eventually his eyes caught sight of a carousel. It wasn't as crowded as Steve would have expected but he hadn't exactly seen many kids Will's age. Except...

Steve spotted a red haired girl, definitely close to Will's age, but clearly more comfortable with the boardwalk. She was clad in leather like most of the people here and a few feathers and trinkets sticking in her slicked up hair. She seemed to be with a group of teens that were closer to Steve's age which were causing trouble for the security guard near the carousel.

The ginger mullet seemed to be the leader and another red haired

teen and another boy seemed to be backing him up with malicious joy on their faces. There was another teen that looked more out of place and after a while, she left them and headed down the boardwalk. Ginger mullet and the red head kid seemed to notice, a mixture of emotions passing over their faces which Steve had trouble deciphering from this distance. The other two teens didn't seem to care about girl number three in the slightest.

Steve's concentration was broken as he felt someone poke him in the small of his back.

"Is it ok if I just buy one? I'll use my pocket change," Will promised.

"Here, no need for that." Steve dug around for whatever he had on him and dropped it into Will's hand. "Save yours for a later date, ok?"

"Ok, thanks Steve," Will smiled, hurrying over to the owner.

Steve looked back out to the carousel but the odd group was gone. They slipped from his mind as Will came running back and they started to walk the rest of the stretch. They went by the Ferris Wheel, Will making it clear that he thought it looked awesome but no way in hell was he going to get on it, before they finally turned back.

Since they didn't see Jonathan, they made their way back to the car and waited a few minutes before they spotted him and Joyce in the distance.

"So how was the boardwalk?" she asked.

"I've never seen a place like it!" Will quickly said. "There was this guy whose face was covered in metal and there's this comic store that has everything! Even if they're bad at ordering their series."

Joyce laughed as she looked over at Jonathan, eyes lighting on a roll of paper in his hands. "What have you got there?"

"Um...well..." His face went red, even in the dark, and Steve's eyebrows quickly rose.

Joyce remained silent as well. She mostly looked amused but Steve

could tell she was going to get worried if Jonathan didn't start talking. Will looked on in confusion.

"I was just...I mean it looked really nice-way out of-of what I had but...she um...it was weird," he finally mumbled out.

"She?" chuckled Joyce. She gently took the item. "Let's see what it is. Oh, that is beautiful."

Steve and Will moved to look at it. The image was a large black and white aerial view of the boardwalk and the ocean. The way it was cut made it look like half the image was empty nothingness and the other half intricate patterns and light. Even with no color it was gorgeous. The symmetry even made it almost look like a painting or something unreal.

"Did it inspire you?" asked Steve.

"Yeah but I...no way could I buy it and she...well she uh..." Jonathan was blushing again. "She uh...stole it and-and I tried to give it back! But she disappeared and then I couldn't find the vendor again-I think he'd left and uh...well...yeah..."

Will was smirking and Steve couldn't help but laugh along with Joyce. "Only you," chuckled Steve. "Only you would have something that strange happen."

"I did try—"

"I'm sure you did sweetheart," Joyce smiled. "We can try to find the vendor tomorrow if you like but for now, I'd say just enjoy the picture. Did you get her name?"

Jonathan shook his head.

"Maybe you'll see her again," laughed Steve. He could tell Jonathan had enough of the teasing though and so he changed his focus. "How was job hunting Joyce?"

"Well, I'm not sure yet but I met a very nice man, Neil, in a video shop. I may be able to get a job there."

"That's great mom," said Will. "I'm glad things are working though I do have a question. Why do I keep seeing things calling this the Murder Capital of the world?"

That was the question Steve had been avoiding in regards to the graffiti but now that it was out, he waited with eager curiosity.

"It's a bit of an exaggeration," sighed Joyce with a roll of her eyes. "As long as you three look out for each other, you shouldn't have anything to worry about. Though I will say, if all the bodies around here stood up at once, we'd have a horrible population problem."

Though the actual subject dark, it was hard not to laugh at Joyce's exaggerated tone. As he got into the car, Steve wondered if it was really true or just rumor that had created the nickname.

They went on like that, talking about some of the oddities they'd seen on the boardwalk along with Joyce reminiscing about her early days of exploring it in the summer. They still had almost a whole month before school started. She was sure they'd find some good adventures there.

Once home, Joyce added, "I know there aren't enough beds so how about Will and I share one for the night and either you boys can share one or one of you can take the couch if you like. We can try and find some mattresses tomorrow but I won't have you sleeping on the floor."

"Will do," chuckled Steve. "Want me to take the couch?"

Jonathan shrugged. "I don't care. I mean, it'll be exactly like when we were kids."

"Hmm, didn't think of that," Steve nodded. He glanced towards the living room, jolting slightly when he felt Jonathan suddenly grab him by the arm.

"Just come up stairs. Your back will thank me."

Steve laughed and followed him. There were two bathrooms which were split amongst the four of them. After Steve brushed his teeth and got dressed, he went back into his own room to grab his blanket

and pillow. Jonathan was already in bed and Steve eased down next to him.

Maybe it would have been a bit weirder with just a friend but Jonathan was more than that. He was his brother, in every way that mattered.

The lights were already out and nothing but the crickets made a noise. Steve was ready to fall asleep when Jonathan murmured, "Remember that first day?"

Steve let out an involuntary laugh. "I still don't know where your mom got the idea that we were friends. I can't even remember what you said but I punched you."

"Punched you harder."

"Sure you did," laughed Steve. "I thought you were such a dick. I hid all day in my room."

"Technically my room, but mom gave it to you because she thought you wanted privacy."

"Yeah." A sad smile crossed Steve's face. Most of that day was honestly a blur now, a mess of anger and sadness and confusion. But he remembered when Jonathan and little Will-only seven at the time-came in and hugged him. He remembered the day after too, Joyce finding them in one giant cuddle pile with the smell of pancakes wafting through the open door. "This place doesn't seem all bad. If a little weird," he softly added.

"That's one way to put it," Jonathan murmured. "It's so...different. I didn't know my grandfather, sure as hell didn't know he had this big old place. Or that he liked to stuff animals."

Steve snorted at that. "There's a beaver in my closet."

"You think that's bad? I found a rattlesnake!"

"Oh fuck, I hate snakes! I would have cried."

"I'll keep that in mind if you ever piss me off. Hide it in your room or

something.”

“Asshole,” laughed Steve as he nudged him with his foot. “Was she cute?”

“What are you talking about?”

“Come on. She was cute right? In a-I’m willing to steal a picture for you-kind of way.”

Steve could feel the heat coming off Jonathan, even in the dark. “Shut up. I’ll probably never see her again.”

“Don’t say never.”

“Stop it!” laughed Jonathan, shoving away Steve’s hands from trying to tickle him. “You’re a massive prick. You know that?”

“And yet you still love me.”

“God knows why,” sighed Jonathan. “Go to bed.”

“I still can’t believe you didn’t get her name—”

“Bed!”

Steve laughed, rolling over and pulling his pillow close. He fell asleep instantly.

---

Billy grabbed the hot dog off the vendor, ignoring the man’s shouts and disappearing into the crowd. He devoured it in a few bites, pushing past people to the end of the boardwalk. Some days he had a goal in mind, other times he just wandered around the place, letting what happened happen. Today he did have a goal but it wasn’t getting a new piercing or finding a semi-descent musician. No, he sniffed the air, looking at the people around him. None of them knew. They had no idea what they walked by, what their chances were.

It was intoxicating. Billy had the power to choose anyone and there was nothing they could do about it.

He walked down the boardwalk, spotting Tommy and Carol going round and round on the carousel. They seemed to be messing with a couple, the girl clearly uncomfortable and the guy stuck in between being flattered and creeped out.

Max was by his side and she made a face upon seeing them, picking up on what the looks and small actions they were doing meant. “Why is everything about fucking with them?”

“Hey!” Billy yelled, knocking her upside the head. “What did I say about using that word?”

“I eat people. I don’t get why one word is such a big deal,” growled out Max. Usually Billy would have been amused, talking about such obvious truths in a crowd of hundreds. It was funny because people were just so damn stupid to not see what was in front of them. He couldn’t appreciate that now though, still focused on what Max had said.

“It’s a fucking big deal.”

“You just used it!”

“Because I’m allowed to,” Billy shot back.

“Fine, then why is everything about sex for them?”

Billy was really tempted to rip out his earrings and stab himself in the eyes. “Did you see something again? I told them not to—”

“Why do you even care? It’s not that big of a deal,” sighed Max.

“You’ve walked in on them twice now! Twice! It’s not fucking ok,” Billy said, trying to force Max to a halt.

She shoved him away though, her eyes harsh. “Our lives aren’t fucking ok. Stop trying to act like my damn brother.”

Billy released the urge to do something incredibly irrational and fell back on just shoving the next person that bumped into him with about half his strength. The guy fell back into a table, knocking over three other people and a mirror in the process. It shattered behind

him and his nose flared up at the smell of blood. Alright, so that had probably been pretty irrational too.

He watched Max twitch and quickly grabbed her by her coat, dragging her away and towards the carousel. Arguing with her was nothing new. Being pissed was a daily occurrence for him.

He just rolled with it and continued on to the attraction. He noticed Nancy was off to the side, and Billy was a bit surprised she hadn't already bolted. She wasn't a fan of any of them and usually didn't stick around long. Billy smirked as he watched her fingers curl in on themselves, the scent of blood clearly catching her.

"If you don't find your first soon, I will shove your god damn face into someone's chest cavity," growled Billy. "You're just putting all of us in danger by putting this off."

Nancy glanced at him before looking away. "I don't care."

"You should," hissed Billy. "You know who's in charge."

He shoved past her, walking over to where Tommy and Carol had just jumped off in front of a security guard.

"You should leave before I have to escort you kids out."

Billy slid in between them. He glanced back at Tommy and Carol. The thought of this fat fuck somehow taking them made him laugh.

"You think this is funny?" The guard reached for a taser. "You should leave. Now."

Out of the corner of Billy's eye, he watched Nancy march off in a huff. He hesitated, watching her go as his knuckles turned white. He stopped himself from feeling sorry for her again. He was done with that. If Max could accept her fate, then Nancy would have to accept it too.

It was that or death and something told Billy she wasn't selfless or strong enough to let herself waste away.

He quickly turned back to the security guard and took a step forward.



Not a word passed as everything slowed and Billy just breathed in the smell. He counted the beats for five seconds and then breathed again. God he was hungry.

“You heard the nice man,” Billy murmured, and he savored the way the security guard shivered. He was so god damn terrified that he’d completely forgotten about his taser. “We should go.”

He sauntered on by, Tommy laughing and Carol letting out a wolf whistle behind him. Well, at least his goal was done. He knew the target.

Billy walked into the crowd, now set on wandering around without a care until the place shut down. He didn’t really give a shit if the others followed him and right now he was pissed enough at Max that he could give even less of one if she got stupid and got caught in the sun. However, those thoughts disappeared from his head as he looked at the guy standing outside the comic shop. His eyes were trained back towards the carousel before turning to a kid, a loving look on his face.

One sniff and Billy knew they weren’t related, they didn’t look that much alike anyways, but they were brothers. There was no doubt about that.

He just...froze.

The connection was a shocking one and he silently blamed Max and their most recent argument. But now that he’d looked, he couldn’t move. He remembered and for the first time in a while he wanted more than what he had.

That old anger bubbled in his chest and with a snarl he forced it back down. He wasn’t strong enough to deal with that. He never would be. God, what a hypocrite he was being! And after telling Nancy she just had to deal with this too. He couldn’t go back on his own word and think about the past. His life was over and dead.

Billy looked away. He needed something to distract himself with and grabbed hold of Tommy who he could feel right behind him. “Let’s go raid a damn liquor store.”

“Hell yeah!” laughed Tommy. He started to hurry off but Billy grabbed him before he could run. “And just so you know, if you aren’t more careful around Max I will drag you into that liquor store myself and break every god damn bottle across your skull. Understood?”

“What’s the point? She’s not your damn sister—”

Billy grabbed Tommy and shoved him into the closest wall. Max and Carol were right behind him but neither cared. He fought with Tommy plenty and they probably assumed it was about any number of stupid things, not the conversation he’d just had with Max.

He pressed his face against Tommy’s, words whispered and dangerous. “She’s still a fucking kid. So. Watch. What. You. Do. Around. Her. Understood?” Billy dug in his nails to make a point. Tommy’s blood didn’t make him twitch, not in any pleasurable way. He bared his teeth and resisted the urge to show fangs. “Understood?”

“Yeah, whatever,” Tommy snorted. He pushed Billy back. “How is it that you’re still a freak amongst us?” Tommy laughed again, leading the way as Billy grinded his teeth. He couldn’t actually kill him, not without hell raining down on his ass. Still, Billy would rip off his fucking arm if he had to just to get the message across.

They continued around the boardwalk into the late hours, Nancy never really rejoining them. At one point, Billy caught sight of her with some guy and it looked like they were almost flirting, both shy and uncertain. The guy would make a good first for Nancy. It would make her really see what kind of life she had now.

Billy kept that in mind as the night went on, darkening around them as they headed back to their bikes. Max jumped on behind him as she always did, though he could tell by her grip that she was still irritated with him. What was new?

“Come on Nancy. It’s time to go,” Billy called out. He watched her slowly make her way to them. At least he didn’t have to worry about her going AWOL and needing to track her down. Her family was long gone from the area and in a situation like this, this group was all she

had to hold on to, even if she didn't want it.

He waited until she got on Carol's bike and then quickly knocked his kick stand up and road off across the sand. They headed home, a few trinkets in hand. Once at the cave, Carol and Tommy walked off in one direction, Max in another, and Billy quickly grabbed Nancy's arm before she could disappear.

Billy's eyes narrowed. "What's his name?"

"Who?"

"The guy you were talking with."

"I talked with a lot of guys," Nancy shot back. She jerked her arm away. "You'd have to be more specific."

"Droopy eyes and sticks out like a sore thumb here. He was hanging around the art area." Billy watched the slight tinge of pink in Nancy's cheeks. Bingo. "What's his name?"

"I don't—"

"If you fully say I don't know I will follow through with the promise I made earlier."

He waited as she slowly made up her mind. She spoke softly, clearly having an idea of why Billy wanted to know. "Jonathan."

"Hmm, boring ass name but it'll have to do. He's going to be your first."

"I won't," hissed Nancy.

"It's amazing that no matter how many times you say it, I don't believe it any more than when you argued with me that first time," Billy replied. "We, right here, are your family now so suck it up and deal with it. Your 'A' honor roll attitude means shit here and don't even give me crap about your family. They left the moment they got a semi-descent confirmation that you were dead."

"Mike—"

"I'm betting your brother's happy you're gone. There's no longer anyone's shadow that he's stuck under and he probably has a pretty low bar to cross now. All he has to do is not end up dead and he's already doing better than you," Billy shot back. "You have nothing here but us, and you're going to realize that nice boy you saw can't swoop in and save you and he will going to be your first. Do you fucking understand me?"

His forehead was practically touching hers as he leaned over her. He hadn't even realized he'd let the fangs drop but there they were with the yellow eyes and distorted face.

For a moment, it almost looked like she was going to cry. Crying was worse than whining and Billy couldn't help but plan for some type of punishment if she sunk that low and grew that annoying, damn the consequences. However, at the last minute she seemed to suck her tears back in and she stood a little straighter, causing Billy to lean back.

"Don't you ever hope your parents will come for you?"

Billy felt himself shift immediately back, both out of shock and just the way that the question made his gut drop. He remembered the guy and the boy at the pier, the way they'd made him freeze and feel so god damn powerless again.

There was nothing he hated more than feeling that way.

Billy grabbed her by the throat, pushing her back, and getting into her face again. "This is our family and family means we stick together and go by the rules. I don't care if it's today or tomorrow or next Friday but one of us is going to feed on Jonathan and it better fucking be you."

He let go and stepped back, watching Nancy grasp at her neck. She still managed to glare daggers at him though. Christ, why couldn't they have turned someone more pliable than this hard-ass standing in front of him?

"You will feed. You're not strong enough to let yourself die," Billy growled as he walked away from her and quickly flew into the air.

The others would follow soon enough. They knew it was time.

For several long, glorious seconds it was just him and the wind. Dark and cool despite the summer days, the night was perfect as the lights of the boardwalk went off one by one.

Of course, then Tommy had to go and ruin it all.

“I know this guy is fat as shit but we’re going to need to feed tomorrow.”

Billy grinded his teeth together. “Then we’ll find someone tomorrow. Don’t state the obvious.”

“I’m just saying dude. I’m fucking starving so if I take a little more to myself—”

“Tommy, fuck off.”

“Yeah Tommy,” laughed Carol in a sing-song voice. “Fuck off.”

Billy closed his eyes and started to wonder why it had to be fucking Tommy and Carol that were turned. If it was just him and Max, maybe he could have been a bit better, but Tommy just kept his nerves constantly on fire. Of course, it was always stupid trying to imagine himself as anything more than he was. Morals meant jack shit when you were this. He didn’t know why he even wasted his time contemplating it.

Just then, he caught the scent of the man before. In the parking lot, late at night, all alone. People were so god damn stupid and predictable.

He dove first, grabbing hold of the man’s collar. He quickly flew away from the parking lot and dropped to the empty beach. Billy bit his neck in just the right way that his screams became gurgled and gasping. He lapped at it quickly as he felt the others join him. Flesh got stuck between his teeth as he slightly moved back, holding the man still through the death tremors. For a split second, he watched Max. She wasn’t holding onto control.

Putting that thought to the side, he went back to holding onto his

neck, his throat swallowing every last drop that he could. With a satisfied sigh he stepped back, wiping his lips as he watched the others partially devour him. When there wasn't much left, Billy gestured forward. "Dump this one in the ocean Tommy."

"Why this one? It doesn't matter if people find them. This city doesn't —"

"I said now."

"Fine! But I think it's stupid. Doesn't matter if anyone finds him," Tommy growled out, latching onto the corpse and disappearing into the night. Carol went with him, probably just to annoy him and tease him about the heavy lifting. Billy honestly didn't get their relationship.

He turned back to Max, a small sigh escaping his lips. "You should have fed last time twerp."

"I wasn't hungry."

"Tonight, I'd disagree."

"I wasn't."

Billy rubbed his forehead tiredly. "You know there's no going back so you might as well feed when you need to. We can't have you freaking out on the pier or something."

"I'm not going to freak out."

Billy didn't argue. Not tonight and not this close to morning. He was just too tired. Tired with it all. He wordlessly flew back into the night, heading straight home and ready for a long sleep. They had to be more careful in summer considering when the sun rose. Winters were better since they had more time but of course less tourists came to the area. It was a mixed bag.

Max actually followed him this time and instead of going straight back, he took her arm and pulled her into a different room.

"Hey! What gives!"

Billy remained silent and forced her to sit next to a stream that ran through the system that they lived in. He started to splash the cool water onto her face and hair. She flinched but Billy made sure she couldn't move away.

There was blood everywhere, already drying along her jaw line, soaked into the red of her hair. It was a good thing Billy was cleaning up the leather right now. The clothes would have been ruined if they'd been left as is.

"Take off your jacket. I need to get in the creases."

Max handed it over, her glare finally starting to diminish. Billy worked hard, scrubbing and cleaning every inch of it, sniffing it repeatedly to see if there was enough blood on it to still damage the leather. He could feel that it was sunrise now. He could always tell, like some warning signal just went off in his head every time it occurred. It didn't matter though. There weren't any spots in the cave besides near the entrance that let the sun in.

"Why didn't you kill me?"

Billy hesitated. "Are we really having that conversation now?"

"Why not?"

"Because it's been a year and a half, that's why," growled Billy. He turned back to the jacket and start scrubbing again even though there wasn't much else to clean off.

They sat there in silence until Max snatched her jacket back. "If you keep doing that, you'll put a hole in it," Max grumbled, quickly pulling it back on.

Max looked at him, still not glaring but so much hatred clear in her eyes. She wasn't talking just to get a rise out of him though. He could tell she wanted to know. Billy wasn't sure he wanted to tell her.

His eyes moved from hers and up her forehead to her hair again. "Christ you got it in there good."

"Hey!"

He ignored her cry and pulled her close, spinning her around so he could better get at her hair. He took out the jewelry and washed out the grease with the blood. He combed through her tangles with his fingers, occasionally snagging on one that made her growl. She never actively pulled away besides some complaining here and there.

When he was pretty sure it was clean, Billy double checked his work, now moving more slowly as his fingers grazed her scalp. He went up and down in regular motions just as she softly murmured, "Why?" He didn't stop. He just kept going as he wished that she'd asked it sooner. He wished she hadn't asked at all. But if there was one thing she deserved, she deserved the truth. Nancy had gotten the truth and Tommy and Carol...well, they'd chosen this life so it was a bit different with them.

But not Max. She deserved something.

"I couldn't do it," he murmured.

He could practically feel her eyes rolling when she spoke. "You kill people all the time. Saints. Asshats. I want the truth."

"I gave you the truth."

"No, you didn't!" She spun around and Billy grabbed her to keep her from getting up. She struggled, hitting her fists against his chest. "It's like Tommy said! You're a pervert who wanted some kid to fool with!"

"Shut the fuck up! I told you—"

"Tommy was right! Tommy—"

"Tommy doesn't know what the fuck he's talking about!"

"Then why!!!" she screeched. "Why didn't you kill me!!!"

"I couldn't!"

"Why!!!"

"I couldn't fucking do it!" screamed Billy. He held her against his



chest, muscles bulging as he kept her there. "I couldn't do it!!!"

He could feel Max crying now even as she struggled.

"But-but why?!" she got out. Her head fell against Billy's chest, bloody tears falling down her cheeks as she burrowed against him. "Why couldn't you do it!?"

"For the exact, same fucking reason you couldn't kill Nancy," Billy hissed out. He held her as tightly as he could. He couldn't say she was starting to relax but she was loosening up. Her face slowly turned upwards again. She looked at him with utter confusion.

"I thought...but you...you do it so well," she whispered.

"Everyone has a first," Billy whispered. "I was ready to kill. I wasn't ready to watch suffering."

"What happened?"

"Do you seriously not remember?" asked Billy.

"I...I remember my mom being covered in blood," Max murmured. "I tried reaching for her. I tried! But she...I couldn't get to her. I couldn't...and then it was just black. Please...Billy please just tell me what happened."

He buried his face in her hair, his breath coming in fast and erratic. Turning Max, it had been one of the worst days of his life.

"I couldn't save your mother. I'm sorry. *He* chose her. *He* moved before I'd even mustered up my courage."

"Where?" murmured Max, her hand moving over her neck. It was smooth now. Billy remembered when it had been a bloody mess.

"I...you were screaming. I don't know what I expected but...you just kept bleeding and you just kept screaming and I started to panic and *he* just kept yelling at me to finish it but you...you're just a kid. I couldn't take everything away from you."

"But you did," hissed Max. "You took my life."

"I know. I know," he repeated, head pressed against her forehead as they rocked back and forth. "I fucked up. I ruined your life. You're my fucking responsibility and I just..."

"So you try and teach me morals despite the fact that we kill people every other night."

"I didn't say I was perfect."

Max snorted and Billy pulled her just a little closer. "I'm just trying to do what's right. I'm trying to look out for you and that means you need to feed when you're hungry. They'll die anyways. You feeding or not feeding on them doesn't change that."

"I know," whispered Max. "I just...I don't know what I was trying to prove. I will."

"And if Tommy does fucking anything to you or in front of you, him or Carol, tell me. Please. We're not fucking animals and you're still a kid," he murmured. "What we do...we do to survive. Anything else isn't appropriate for someone your age. Got it?"

Max shook her head again. "You're always trying with me."

"Because it's my responsibility."

"Is it? Or is that just what *he* told you?"

"It's my choice," Billy responded. "*He* wanted to kill you, even afterwards. Having a kid...*he* thought it would just get in the way."

Max's eyes went wide. "You never told me that."

"Because you never fucking listen to me," Billy said, a strange mixture of anger and amusement passing through his voice. "I just... we have forever together and I'm just trying to do what's right."

Max looked away again, her body shuttering for a moment before she whispered, "Did you ever have a sister?"

Out of everyone, Max knew the most. She basically knew the whole truth, being the second one turned and all. Tommy, Carol, even

Nancy were clueless but Max knew the story and Billy didn't get so defensive with the question. "No. It was just me," whispered Billy. "Why?"

"Because you fucking suck as a big brother."

"Hey, what did I say about language?"

"Oh come on. Does it really matter?"

"Yes! Just...give it another year or something. You're growing up too damn quickly."

"What did you expect?" snorted Max. "It's not like I had another choice."

"I know," Billy repeated. "Just remember what I said. Ok? Especially about Tommy. I'll rip his fucking throat out if I have to."

"*He* wouldn't like it."

"Well then *he* can have me turn someone who isn't a fucking dick next time," growled Billy. "Got it?"

Max nodded, wiping at her eyes. Billy could feel the day was really starting now and stood up, pulling Max with him.

"You know I only half hate you, right?" Max said. "I hate *him* with everything I've got."

"Yeah, well me too kid," sighed Billy. "Come on, let's go to bed."

Max nodded and they headed into some of the darker parts of the cave and away from where Tommy and Carol usually were. Billy kicked off his boots and flew upwards, latching onto the bar before letting himself hang down. It was so fucking clique but it was honestly more comfortable than lying down on some bed. Logically it didn't make since. He still had blood inside him which should be rushing to his head right now but it was what it was. He just closed his eyes and fell asleep, tired but more content at having gotten somewhere with Max.

He'd figured a day like this would come but he'd still feared that they would just stay angry with each other for eternity. At least now they had a sort of understanding.

The sun rose higher and Billy drifted off to sleep.

## 2. Close Call

### Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks again for the overwhelming response! I'm starting the next semester on Wednesday so I'm going to update once a week. It's the best I can do right now. Anyways, thank you so much for reading and I hope you enjoy. Also for those interested, I made a playlist for this fic because I couldn't help myself. Thanks again!

<https://8tracks.com/changethecircumstances/the-bloodsucking-brady-bunch>

“Boys! Time to get up!”

Steve let out a slight groan, burying his face deeper into the pillow. He felt a leg push at him but he ignored it. He might have drifted off to sleep again, it was hard to say, but a few seconds later Joyce was already walking by again.

“Boys!!” she called.

Steve kept his eyes practically glued shut. His pillow still smelled like his old room. It was a familiar comfort, and he held onto that feeling. Something shoved him again. He ignored the pressure as it changed from just pushing his legs to pushing the small of his back. He needed just a few more minutes...

“UhArgACK!”

“What kind of noise was that?”

Steve groaned from the floor. “The noise of my brother shoving me off the mattress.”

“Hmm, that’s a pretty specific noise. I wonder if you’ll ever need to use it again.”

Steve picked up his pillow and threw it at Jonathan’s head just as Joyce called out again with only slight more irritation in her voice.

“Boys!!!”

“Coming!” they called back. Jonathan jumped to his feet and hurried downstairs, Steve taking a few more seconds to yawn and stretch before he reluctantly followed.

His feet felt like lead with each thud he made down the stairs. He walked to the kitchen where Will looked just as perky and awake as Jonathan. It was a quality of theirs that Steve despised.

“Listen, if you boys don’t mind eating what we have for breakfast, I’m going to go into town to the grocery store. Now that we know that the fridge works, we can stock up on some food. I’ll see about places for mattresses and any other furniture we might need too. I’ll try to be back by lunchtime. Sound good?” asked Joyce as she swung her purse over her shoulder and grabbed her keys.

Jonathan nodded. “We could continue cleaning up too.”

“That would be wonderful sweetheart. But don’t push yourselves and Will, remember to ask your brothers if you need help with something. That goes for both of you too. I don’t need someone dropping a chest on their foot or falling off a wobbly chair because he was trying to be macho and do it by himself.” She quickly went and kissed them all on the cheek. “And Steve, splash your face with some water. You look like death.”

“He always looks like that!” laughed Will. “Zombie boy.”

Steve rolled his eyes. “Ha ha, so original.”

Joyce headed to the main the door. “I’ll see you boys later!”

“Bye!” they all called out. The door shut and they looked back towards each other.

“Well...” Jonathan slowly said. “I guess cereal?”

“Well I really don’t feel like eating a can of beans,” snorted Steve.

“We should throw out the tangerines,” Will added. “They’re starting to smell.”

With their options firmly examined, Steve, only slightly slower, followed after the two Byers. They ate and then quickly went cleaning up the house again, only staying out of the attic because Joyce had asked. They started moving things around, hiding or tossing some of the stuffed animals. They got out the cleaning supplies as well, wiping windows and dusting all the corners they could find. The first floor was actually looking pretty decent and they moved a desk from downstairs to Joyce's room and a small side table that could be placed by Will's bed.

There was still a closet that could be cleared out but otherwise, the first floor was done by the time Joyce got home.

"Have you been working the entire time?" she asked as she walked in. Bags of groceries hung from her arms.

As Jonathan and Will rushed out to grab the rest, Steve took what bags she'd brought and started putting up food. "Don't worry, we took breaks here and there," he told her with a small smile. "We found a desk you might like. We put it in your room."

"Oh, thank you. Speaking of furniture, I found a place we can get both you and Jonathan mattresses. It's a bit expensive but I stopped back at that video store and I got the ok so we'll be able to afford them."

Steve blinked, his eyes widening in shock. "You got the job?"

"I got the job!"

Steve quickly went in to hug her tight, the news easing his stress just a little. "That's great! When do you start?"

"Tomorrow. But we can go ahead and pick up the mattresses today if you don't mind helping."

"Not at all," Steve replied.

When Jonathan and Will got back, they filled them in on the news and finished putting up the groceries. They went outside and hooked up the trailer again and headed back into town. They grabbed the mattresses and ended up purchasing some new sheets before heading

back. For the first time in their new home, the family sat down for a quick lunch before pulling the mattresses in and setting them up.

Then it was back to cleaning. The sooner it was finished, the sooner the place would really feel like something permanent and theirs.

Joyce started to focus on the second story as the boys went outside to start exploring and clearing out the property around them. There was a lot of random junk that they started throwing in a pile. Steve was off in the field, trying to figure out if there were any markers to give them a definitive end to their land, when he heard the cry.

Whipping around, Steve rushed back, hearing the cry again and this time more clearly. "Steve!"

He rushed across the land and towards the large shed-or maybe it had been meant to be a barn, it was hard to say. Steve focused more on shoving the side door open. The light was hazy and poor, only a few clear beams shining through open and cracked windows and onto two beautifies that appeared in front of Steve.

"Look what I found."

Steve couldn't think of anything to yell at Jonathan for making him worry, his eyes lighting up at the two vehicles instead. "Holy hell! I call the bike!"

"I found it," snorted Jonathan as Steve rushed over and started to look over the motorcycle.

"And will you ever want to ride it?"

"No—"

"Just what I thought," snorted Steve. He looked to the car and though the bike was practically calling his name, the car was pretty sweet too. "Damn, I can't believe these are in near mint condition!"

"From the stories mom told, grandpa never really drove anywhere. Before, if he found a vehicle he liked enough, he'd buy it and spiff it up. Though he'd never really use them."



“Talk about a serious waste. You know, once we find somewhere to work this could turn out really nice. Then we wouldn’t have to worry about taking turns with Joyce’s car or anything.”

Jonathan shook his head. “Mom is really against the idea.”

“I know but...I want to help. You want to help! If we try hard enough, we could probably come to some agreement, right?”

“Well...at the very least we could look for jobs today. Ask around. If we find someone willing then we could actually show mom a plan. She’ll be more willing to compromise then,” said Jonathan.

“That could work,” Steve replied just as Will rushed in.

“Whoa,” he said, eyes going wide. “Those are...you know, you should have called something like, don’t worry. We’re not dying here. Not just yell for someone to come.”

“Sorry,” Jonathan said with a small smile. “I’ll try to remember that.”

Will’s slight pout quickly changed to excitement again. “Does mom know about these?”

“No idea. Let’s find out.”

They rushed back inside and the rest of the day became focused on the shed and finding everything else in it. Most of the things looked like old farming tools that they might be able to clean up and sell and more odd knickknacks and stuffed animals.

Joyce gave them the ok to use the car though she asked them to take the bike to a shop just to make sure it really was in working order. Will asked to come along and after hitching the bike to the back of the new car, they headed into town for the second time that day. This time it was just the three of them though, Joyce staying behind to clean a bit more and make dinner.

Dropping the bike off at a garage with a late closing time and which looked semi-descent, it took about three more minutes before they went back to the boardwalk. It simply was the only place to do anything in the city, at least for people their age. That seemed to go

for jobs too as the other people they talked to turned them down. The boardwalk seemed the only chance at getting something new.

The crowd was just as big as last night and only getting bigger as twilight came. The remaining light of the sun disappeared and Steve wondered if the crowd ever truly diminished or just exponentially grew as his eyes moved over the stores and vendors. There were a few he remembered but he swore everything had changed or moved. He kept having to double back, trying to remember if he'd seen one thing the night before or not, his senses almost overpowered by the lights and noise.

Steve stopped at a few places or Jonathan would suggest something as they continued asking around, getting suggestions and some very helpful-and not so helpful-advice. It didn't seem that they would get very far in their search though and Steve wondered if they should just head back when he heard someone from behind them.

"Did you like the photo?"

Steve turned around and the blush that immediately crept onto Jonathan's cheeks had the light bulb in Steve's head going off. Also... it was that teen from the carousel! Steve glanced around but didn't see the rest of the entourage and he wondered if she'd ditched them again like she'd done the night before. Up close, she was cute in that girl next door sort of way though the hair cut and choice of makeup suggested more girl next door rebelling against parents. It still didn't make her fit in the boardwalk's crowd any better than Steve did though.

"I...well yeah. But...I should return that. You stole it," Jonathan finally got out.

"Don't worry about him. He overprices everything and he's a major asshole," she smiled. Then as if to try and add extra reassurance, she said, "Jonathan, really, he's lucky that someone like you appreciates it. Even if he's too pompous to care."

Jonathan tried not to smile at that and Steve decided it was time to jump. "I'm sorry, I don't think Jonathan's introduced us."

“That would be a bit odd. I don’t think I even introduced myself,” she chuckled. “I’m Nancy.”

“Steve.”

“Will,” Will said, giving a little wave.

“Nice to meet you,” Nancy said.

She was definitely polite like a girl next door but everywhere she looked made Steve feel like they were in a warzone. Or a really large buffet. He shook his head. Ok, weird thought but he supposed that both could require a lot of focus and concentration if a person was hungry enough for the latter. He blinked and realized Nancy and Jonathan had started talking again and Will’s attention had wandered to other things. It seemed their job hunting was done for now, not that Steve minded. After working all day, he was ready for some fun.

Steve nudged Will and raised an eyebrow. Will gave him a pitiful glance, clearly begging to do something else. Stifling a laugh, Steve interrupted what Jonathan was saying. “Hey, we’re thinking of going to see the concert on the beach. We’ll catch you later. Nice to meet you Nancy.”

Jonathan stumbled in his words. “Wait, Steve—”

“Meet you at the car in an hour and a half?” asked Steve.

Jonathan hesitated. “Uh...I mean—”

“Good, glad you agree,” smirked Steve.

“Bye, Jonathan,” Will grinned, taking hold of Steve’s hand and quickly walking off in a different direction. Steve went willingly, gave a little salute as Jonathan and Nancy disappeared in the crowd, and fully spun around, looking at the boardwalk ahead of them.

They walked on down to the beach this time. There was a wooden stage and Steve imagined they got a lot of people down here performing. Tonight it seemed to be someone pretty popular, at least for the area. People screamed the guys name as he sauntered around on stage with his saxophone. He was covered in so much sweat that it

practically shown from the lights and fire.

“Not David Bowie but pretty rocking! Huh?!” Steve called out.

“Yeah!” Will yelled back. He jumped up a few times, both getting into the music and just trying to get a better view.

Eventually, Steve took pity on him and bent down, Will jumping up on his back. Steve wobbled a bit and yelled, “Not going to be able to do this forever! You’re getting too big!”

“Don’t drop me!” Will shouted into his ear.

Steve laughed and bounced him a little, the music blasting into his ears and the overall high of the crowd running off on him. He eventually had to set Will down, the kid definitely bigger than he was a few years ago. He kept a hand on him up until he shouted into the air, using his hands to try and roar over the crowd. His hand went back down and—

Damn it! Steve did a quick, three-sixty scan. He’d be right there, right beside him. He had to be and yet... Steve did it again but he didn’t even see a hint of his brown hair.

“Will!”

Come on, he knew better than this! He’d literally been by Steve’s side just a second ago. Steve pushed past everyone, head looking around. His movements slowly started to become more and more erratic along with each desperate question as the seconds ticked by.

“Have you seen a kid?”

“He has a bowl cut.”

“Small! He’s small!”

“Brown hair, hazel eyes! Come on!”

Where was he!!! What could have—

“Hey!”

Steve yelped, feeling a small fist punch him in the lower back. It was a weird place to hit but god damn strong so the last thing he expected when he turned around was to see a kid.

It took him a second but recognition flared up in his mind as he looked at the red hair and leather jacket. "Hold on...you're—"

"I'm who?" she shot back with a glare.

"Uh n-no one-Will!" Like that, Steve felt his entire body flood with relief as Will slammed into him. He hugged so tightly that Will finally let out a muffled, "You're choking me!"

Steve just laughed, too thankful to care. "Where did you go?"

"Some guy shoved me and I-I just got turned around," got out Will. He shook away tears and desperately added, "I'm sorry! I thought I was going back to you but I guess I was just going in the opposite direction."

"It's ok. It's ok. You're here now," sighed Steve. He looked up. "Thank you-hey! Where are you going?"

The red haired kid didn't respond. She started to head off but since she wasn't heading back into the crowd, Steve actually had a chance to keep an eye on her. He quickened his pace to catch up, this time making sure Will stayed by his side. "Hey! How the hell did you even find me?"

"He gave me a description," the girl said without turning around. "Duh."

"I tried saying thanks already. She doesn't seem big on it," Will said, leaning next to Steve.

"Are you with someone here?" asked Steve. They were away from the concert and just on the beach now, passing random groups as they headed to the nearest set of stairs for the boardwalk.

She didn't respond.

"Do you need help—"

“Go away.”

“You’re the same age as Will! I can’t just leave you alone here,” sighed Steve.

“Fuck off!”

Will’s mouth dropped in shock. For a moment, Steve was completely taken aback before he mustered out another pitiful, “Hey!”

The girl didn’t even turn around. She just jumped up the stairs and headed onto the boardwalk, Steve finally pushing his legs to run after her.

“Where are your parents?” asked Steve.

At that question, the girl did freeze. She spun around, her mouth not in a frown but closer to that of an animalistic growl. “Don’t—”

“Max,” interrupted a smug sounding voice. “I have been looking everywhere for you.”

“Oh don’t put on a damn show,” the girl growled out.

Steve guessed Max was probably a nickname but it suited her. And the guy that had just wrapped his arm around her...it was that ginger from the carousel. Out of all the individuals and groups Steve had seen, he just kept running into these people.

“Are you siblings?” asked Will, looking curiously between them.

“No.” Max said.

“Yes,” said ginger.

“Asshole.”

“I thought we had our fucking moment!”

“Oh, so you’re calling me sister now? Are we going to sit down and braid each other’s hair next?”

“Technically already did that and it’s not my fault you’re a messy

eater.”

“You cleaned it. That doesn’t count as a moment.”

“So we’re back to this are we?!”

“I’m happy you told me the truth! Ok!” Max yelled. “But you still piss me off!”

“Well that goes ditto for me kid!”

Steve looked back and forth, unsure if he should just turn around and leave or actually say something. They were really getting into it and an uncertain “Um...” slipped from Steve’s mouth.

“What!!!” they both yelled, heads whipping towards them.

“I just...thanks for helping Will find me,” Steve got out, taking a step back. He glanced back to Max who just crossed her arms and looked away, clearly indifferent. Her maybe-brother’s face changed though. Steve couldn’t figure out why as the guy stepped closer.

“Be careful,” the guy softly said. “You can lose a lot of shit in a flash if you’re not, pretty boy.”

“Uh...thanks?”

The guy snorted, the serious expression quickly being replaced with a smirk. “See you around. Let’s go Max.”

“Don’t boss me around!”

Ginger let out a tired groan. “Just shut up and come on.”

Steve shook his head as he watched them disappear into the crowd, still bickering back and forth. He glanced over towards Will and saw him quickly cover a smile behind his hands. “What’s got you so amused?”

“He called you pretty boy,” Will laughed.

“Yeah, well the compliment was a bit diminished since he was

threatening me.”

“It sounded more like advice.”

“Will, if anyone gets in your face like that and looks at you like that, they are not giving advice,” sighed Steve.

“Maybe not for normal people but maybe that’s just how he is,” Will tried.

“Who knows. I will say they were quite a pair,” sighed Steve. “Want to try and find the comic store and then meet up with Jonathan afterwards?”

Will nodded and they quickly headed down the boardwalk. Once they found the store again, Steve actually went in and looked around with Will, listening to him explain why one issue was better than others and the storylines and crossovers. It had been a while since Steve had been in to comics but it was always fun watching Will get passionate.

They happened to run into Jonathan on the way back to the car and Steve nudged him with his arm. “So,” he said, smiling from ear to ear, “how was your time with Nancy?”

“It was fine. It’s not that big of a deal,” Jonathan tried.

“This is a huge deal,” Steve replied. “When was the last time you showed a girl an inkling of interest?”

“It really isn’t,” sighed Jonathan. “Besides, I think she has a boyfriend.”

Jonathan’s expression showed that it was clearly a big deal and that he definitely was interested in Nancy despite his words. However, Steve could also tell Jonathan probably wanted to sit and think on it first rather than spout rumors or say what came to his head. It was just how he was.

Because of that, Steve said, “Alright, alright. But hey! You won’t guess what happened to us.”



Steve started to talk about the story as he again thought about how weird it was that apparently Nancy hung around Max's and ginger guy's group. He wondered if Jonathan would find out some sort of reason to that but for the moment, Steve just kept talking.

Once at the car, they went back to the shop they'd dropped the bike off. It turned out it was all good to go and after filling it up with gas, Steve decided to drive it back instead of hitching it to the car. He offered Will to jump on back, both out of politeness and wanting to see that momentary spark in Will's eyes that said he really wanted to. Of course, that spark got covered up with ideas of safety and logic and Will quickly said, "I'll take shot-gun. I never get it anyway."

Steve smiled at that and added, "Maybe when I get a helmet for you or something."

Will nodded, the smile coming back. "Maybe then," he agreed.

Steve jumped onto the bike, following them away from the garage and back through the city. Driving on a motorcycle made the entire thing more exciting, almost more personal. Bikes seemed to be a favored mode of transportation here, a lot of groups riding around and sticking together. The fact that he had the motorcycle now, and the extra level of freedom that came with it, had Steve's heart pounding with excitement.

Even driving on the long, gravel road back home wasn't as dull as the smell of the city slipped away to reveal trees and open farm land. Once getting home, he parked near the front of the house and Joyce met them outside. The rest of the evening was relaxing and even a bit fun. They ate dinner together, played an old board game from Joyce's childhood that she'd found in a closet, and then Steve was able to go to his own bed. He didn't have the frame for it but that part he didn't really care about. It was nice having his own room like this, fully private and able to put his stuff where he wanted it. Despite still missing their old home and their old town, this house was far larger and they had plenty of space.

Things were finally looking up, minus the little scare on the boardwalk. Steve pulled his blanket up and quickly fell asleep.

---

Max was still peeved with him and Billy supposed he shouldn't have said yes to that sibling thing. But to him, she was a sibling and he even felt that way about Tommy and Carol even if he hated their guts. Nancy too despite how god damn annoying she was. It was the best way he could deal with the stress of it all, his reasoning for why he kept going and dealt with hell again and again. But Billy dropped the issue for now and focused on at least one thing he didn't think would annoy Max. He nudged her, almost smiling.

"I'm proud of what you did," he murmured as they walked in between people.

"It's your rule," Max muttered.

"That you agree with. Unlike everyone else."

Max let out a tired sigh. "If Tommy had found him...or god forbid *he* had—"

"Yeah, I know. I'm proud of you Max," Billy said with another nudge. He sniffed and shook his head. "God I still have their damn smell in my nose though."

"It was so easy to find the teen," groaned Max. "All trees and wind and cow shit."

Billy laughed. "They'll acclimate eventually. If they stick around long enough." Or survived long enough. But that thought remained unspoken even if Max was thinking the same thing.

She nodded and they walked around, messing with people and vendors and the games on the boardwalk to pass the time. They stopped at a carnival style game where you had to knock over bottles. It was totally rigged like most but Max marched up, grabbed the ball, and threw it so hard that the bottles shattered, even the one that was nailed down. Billy laughed at the scared and shocked face of the guy behind the counter as he handed her the biggest bear with shaking hands.

"Hell yeah. I've been waiting to get one of these," Max smirked, dragging it behind her as they walked off.

They went around the area, for a while until they ran into Tommy. He looked pleased, grinning from ear to ear with a hungry look in his eyes. He was clearly thinking about food. "Why not them over there? They smell foreign enough. Probably tourists. They won't be missed."

Billy glanced over and immediately shook his head. He knew there was a limited amount of people that could be in a single area but the boardwalk always seemed to make more appear out of thin air. A hundred thousand faces passing by and not a single one interesting enough to stick in his mind. But already in two days he'd seen this pair three times.

He slowly turned to Tommy. "You know the rules."

"Fine, not the kid then. Christ," sighed Tommy.

Carol eased up beside him with a smirk. "He looks yummy."

"I said no." The words came instinctively, everyone looking shocked for a moment.

"Ah, don't tell me you're having that all to yourself," Carol murmured with a lick of her lips.

"More like I have a better target," Billy shot back. "There's a party, inland and away from everyone else. Should be at least six, seven, maybe more."

"Hmm, not bad Billy boy," grinned Tommy as he slapped him on his back. "I'm guessing no kids though."

"Kids are off limits," hissed Billy.

"Why? Max sure wasn't."

Before Billy could do anything, Max grabbed hold of Tommy and shoved as hard as she could.

Carol gaped. "Excuse you gremlin!"

Billy grabbed her. "Don't call her that!"

“So? You’ve called her much worse.”

Tommy pushed himself up, ignoring the people he’d fallen into and grabbing hold of Max. She struggled as he wrapped an arm around her neck and lifted her off the ground. Billy tried to get to her but Carol got in the way. He grabbed hold of her shoulders, ready to do whatever he needed to get to Max just as she elbowed Tommy in the stomach, loosening his grip and allowing her to drop to the ground.

“Excuse me, but what is going on here?”

Billy and Carol shoved each other away as Max quickly kicked Tommy and stepped back. Tommy let out a growl, clearly ready to launch himself forward as the man spoke again. “I’ll have to call security if you don’t leave now.”

Tommy rubbed his side, clearly hurt by Max’s strike. It made Billy grin though he dropped it as he turned to the man. He held up his hands, both mocking and surrendering in one go. “No problem. We’ll leave,” he smirked.

Max immediately stepped to his side, closer than normal. Billy put an arm around her and this time she didn’t move away. Tommy and Carol didn’t care, not realizing what was standing just three feet away. But Max and Billy did and Billy could feel *his* eyes on his back. They’d probably have another fucking talk tonight. Billy’s stomach turned at the thought.

He of course knew *he* was there. *He* was there almost every night and Billy made it a point to avoid *him*. Just seeing *him* made his senses get all confused, anger rising even as he remained submissive and afraid. Considering what they’d just been fighting about, that didn’t help either. What little humanity Billy had left was practically a holy grail compared to *his* lack there of. And then of course that fucking guy and his damn little brother, seeing them again and just thinking about all that could have fucking been...

Billy forced himself not to yell, to shout, not to even talk as they walked away. He might just break if he did. Tommy drifted to Carol, the two groups following each other but remaining clearly separate. Billy held onto Max like an anchor and he could see her mimicking

him. Why did *he* have to fucking show up?

The only thing that he could focus on other than *him* was the hunger so he started to head back to the bikes, Carol and Tommy following. Along the way Billy spotted Nancy talking to Jonathan again. Billy walked over and grabbed her arm, pulling her slightly and saying, "Time to go."

"But—"

"Now," Billy growled, letting go and walking away. He didn't have to look behind in order to know when she began to follow him. However, he focused more on the scent that had just filled his nose. It was so familiar-ah! He should have known. Jonathan looked just like the kid but...fuck. Even knowing that, Billy would have to stick with what he'd said. The other two were still off limits but Jonathan... Nancy needed to learn. And perhaps Billy did to. He couldn't back out of something like this. It just diminished his role as leader and would give false hope to Nancy. Better to continue on.

Max's face showed that she'd made the same connection between Jonathan and the others though they both remained quiet. Once at the other side of the boardwalk, they got onto their respective bikes. Instead of going off onto the sand, they turned their bikes onto the pavement. For a while, no one said anything until Nancy found the courage to call out, "We're not going back to the caves!?"

Billy didn't answer though he could hear Tommy's cries of excitement and Carol's explanation. He hit the gas harder, finally going off of official roads and into the woods. As they got closer, he started to pick up the sound and smell and followed that. Fire and booze and blood, all mixed together for their last party.

Nancy's understanding and fear was almost overwhelming though. It hadn't been Billy's intention to drag her along but if she stuck around that was her own choice. Maybe it was just her way of easing into this as she finally realized there wasn't another future ahead of her.

They stopped out on the edge, the party going hard enough and long enough that the people didn't notice. There were eight in total, even better meaning two for each. They mostly looked like a bunch of

dumb drop-outs and those kinds of thoughts always made Billy feel better whenever doubt crept in.

Billy felt Max get off first before he followed, walking in between two guys and grabbing an unopened beer. He snapped off the lid, took a swig, and then glanced to his right. "You have no fucking clue. Do you?"

The guy just let out a shout like Billy had said something particularly cool or funny. The reaction seemed to be getting Tommy and Carol back in the mood though as usual, Max wasn't one for theatrics. She rolled her eyes and bent down by one girl's leg, grabbing her and suddenly pulling her to the ground.

In seconds they were on them. Billy ignored the thoughts of *him* and the guys on the boardwalk. He just dug in, letting blood flow between his lips as he tore at flesh and heard the screams around him. Even as horrifying as that first time had been, the taste of this had always been the most filling thing to ever grace his lips. That had been the final nail in the coffin for him. No human would think that. Thus, he couldn't be human and he never would be again.

Billy tore apart skulls and ripped open veins like they were putty. He drank all that he could and then some, the fire beginning to die out. He stepped away, glancing towards Max as she wiped at her mouth.

"Now that was a party!" Tommy yelled out.

"I knew it would be," responded Billy as he attempted to keep his voice under control. However, Tommy seemed to have forgotten their whole fight as he simply walked by and slapped Billy on the back.

"Looks like the bird flew away. I was hoping she'd finally join in the fun."

Billy looked back, all trace of Nancy gone. So she hadn't had the stomach.

"The sun's coming up soon," yawned Carol. "Better get going if we don't want toast for desert."

Max rolled her eyes and Billy resisted the urge to groan at that

horrible joke. They got back on their bikes and quickly arrived back at the cave. Nancy was there, of course she was. The sun was coming out soon and though it wouldn't kill her, it would be irritable and painful. She had nowhere else to go despite the fear and hatred for what surrounded her.

Carol and Tommy laughed, taunting as they walked by and deeper into the caves. Nancy kept her head down, remnants of tears on her cheeks as Max tried to be of some comfort but Nancy only flinched.

Momentary confusion and then pure anger flared up in Max as she marched away. Nancy hid her face, eyes closed tightly as if that would somehow make it go away.

"Difficult. Right?" Billy murmured.

Nancy wiped at her eyes.

"And it just keeps getting harder. But you already knew that. Didn't you? You've felt it."

"How much longer?" Nancy whispered. She looked so sad and desperate. She was starting to realize there wasn't another way.

"Max managed four months. I managed for three," Billy murmured. "Carol and Tommy jumped in head first but when you've never wanted it...the stubbornness can help you hold out. That doesn't make it a fix."

Nancy blinked as confusion clouded her eyes. "But I'd always thought you—"

He heard it. "I have to go." The sound fit in with everything else unless one knew the signal to listen too.

"But the sun is coming—"

"Don't get mushy on me now Nancy like you give a shit. I threatened to shove your face into a chest cavity and I'm still going to keep that promise if I have to," retorted Billy. He didn't wait to see her reaction, just hurried out of the cave and up to the top, flying away from the cave but remaining by the seaside. Carol and Tommy would

be heading off to sleep now and Billy was sure Nancy wouldn't want to follow him after that comment.

And out of everyone, Max knew better than to follow.

Billy eventually landed, the stretch of cliff nearly identical to where he'd just come from. He watched the waves crash at the bottom of the cliffs, the sky black, and the small lights of stars sparkling overhead. Away from the city and the boardwalk and the flashing lights...it was a moment of peace.

"All you can do is disappoint. Can't you?"

Billy closed his eyes, taking in a deep breath. That familiar voice broke the comment like shattering china.

"Look at me when I'm talking to you son."

Billy slowly turned around. "Dad."

And there *he* stood.

The slap stung and was too fast for Billy to avoid.

"The whole reason I'm not there is so you can lead in my place. So you can protect me," hissed his father. "But you can't even do that."

"It was just a disagreement," Billy got out, finally looking at him again.

"About?"

"It doesn't—"

His father grabbed him by the neck, pushing him out towards the cliff's edge. "About what? Answer me."

Billy swallowed thickly, feeling how his old man's hand only tightened. His father would just keep asking so Billy forced out the answer. "Tommy didn't want to follow the rule—"

"You mean that ridiculous one you put in place after your failure?"



When will you learn that we're better than them?" his father asked, finally stepping back and letting go.

"I know—"

"Actions speak louder than words so clearly you don't," hissed his father. "I gave you a gift and yet you still don't have the smarts to fully embrace it."

"A gift? A gift! This is a—" Billy was cut short. The motion was sudden, causing Billy's head to snap to the side. One of his teeth dug into his lip, ripping the skin and making his blood drip onto the sand. He watched the back droplets form in random patterns.

"It was a gift," continued his father, "one which I had hoped would teach you a thing or two about respect. About responsibility. I have been trying to make you a man and yet you fail me every time." He took a step closer again, eyes narrowed as he looked Billy down. "Your rule does nothing but holds you back. It weakens you and that is the last thing we need with the danger that's come here."

Ok, as fucking weird as his life had become, that wording sounded way to strange and prophetic. "What danger?" Billy asked.

"It doesn't concern you."

A scowl twisted across Billy's face. "Doesn't-weren't we just talking about responsibility!"

"And respect!" his father yelled into his face, knocking Billy to the ground. "You do not choose which you will take up! You learn both as any respecting young man should! You have one last chance. If you cannot keep this family together then I will."

Billy pushed himself up and onto his elbows. "How can you expect me to lead if you never tell me anything!?"

"Because you can't handle anything. You can barely handle this!"

Billy flinched as his father bent down and grabbed him again. His father pulled him to and off his feet, fingernails digging up under his chin and blood dripping down his neck.

"No more fights. No more hesitating. No more of your stupid rules. Children are no more off limits than any other human, and that girl, Nancy, will feed by the end of the week. Otherwise, you will pay the price. Do you understand?"

Billy struggled. He kicked and clawed but his father managed to keep his grip strong and unbreakable until he suddenly pulled Billy close and screamed into his face.

*"Do you understand?!"*

Billy shook, his breathing erratic and his eyes tightly shut. "Yes sir."

"Look at me when I am talking to you."

Eternity was passing. At least it felt like it as his father's face came into view. Yellow eyes stared back with fangs bared.

"Now...do you understand son?"

"Yes sir," Billy replied. He forced his voice to go louder and stronger. He sounded more sure than he felt.

"Good," his father murmured. He slowly put Billy back on his feet and let go. He stepped back, a small nod. "Good. I'd hate to have to kill my own son."

The lie was damn obvious but the words no longer stung. Such words were the best he could expect from the old man. Billy looked away and when he glanced back his dad was gone. Billy covered his face in his hands, shoulders shaking as his legs gave out and he fell back to the sand once more. He kicked out, loose rocks falling over the edge.

"Fuck!"

He believed his father and as always, he'd have to do what his father told him. He didn't have another choice, no way out and yet...

Billy couldn't even think about hurting that small boy. Or any kid like that. Turning Max had been the biggest mistake of his life and just thinking of all the things she'd missed out on, that she still would because of him, Billy couldn't stand doing that to another kid

whether he just killed them or turned them.

But he was a killer! That's what his father had called him again and again. It was in his blood, it was what he knew best! He had to follow what he knew. He had to do as his father asked otherwise...

His skin started to itch and one look up showed dawn was beginning. In a flash he went back to the cave before the sun could hurt him more than that. Walking through, he saw Nancy was already asleep as he made it past her and into the dark.

Max was out cold too, which was good because Billy really didn't feel like answering her questions as to what had just happened. Billy looked at her for a moment, the bear she'd won that day tightly wrapped in her arms.

Still so young and now young forever. That kid had to be about her age, the other two around Billy's. He'd tried to keep two of them off limits even if he had to keep Jonathan on the menu for Nancy. But now...he didn't know what to do. Getting them all out of the way would be so much easier and it would make his father happy, perhaps even get him off his back for a bit.

But still he thought about the past, about what-ifs and lost chances.

He saw himself in that teen, saw what he could have had and what Max could have had if that bastard hadn't...

Maybe this was a test for Billy too. Just seeing those two had brought up not-so dead feelings and thoughts, things that he'd buried but never really killed. If he wanted to keep surviving, he needed to end these thoughts. Perhaps killing those two would help, symbolize the final moment of transformation.

Could he bring himself to do it?

Billy didn't know.

### 3. Missing Persons

#### Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks again for the lovely kudos and reading! It means a lot! I'm gonna keep with the weekly updates and it does look like I'm going to stick with six chapters. Anyway, thank you and I hope you enjoy!

A few days passed as Steve got settled into Santa Carla. He still hadn't found any luck with jobs though Jonathan had gotten a possible offer. They talked it over with Joyce and since they could now get around town too, she was more willing if Jonathan could at least get more info for the job.

They finished cleaning up the house in that time and had either found or bought more furniture for the place. Almost all the stuffed animals were gone though every now and then Steve found one lurking behind something. Even the yard had been cleared out so that the place didn't feel like some abandoned farm home.

With there being no school, the days were mostly boring since Joyce was at work during that time and the only piece of technology in the house was a phone. Night was when anything exciting seemed to happen. Despite thinking there couldn't be more to see after going to the boardwalk three different times, it still remained the big place to go. It was just the main thing to do in the city and definitely the wildest area.

Will always came with Steve and Jonathan, his goal obviously to go back to the comic book store or the arcade place that they found on their third trip. Steve walked around without a goal, no place really sticking out to him that made him want to go back for more. He still enjoyed the crazy and insane things around him, and he still felt like an alien on a new planet. However, those nights of people watching and store browsing were usually stuck with Will, not that he minded the company. Jonathan often found Nancy at one point or another during the night and Will would drag Steve away to let them do yucky teen things. It meant Steve still got very little information about who Nancy was.

Whether or not Jonathan was right about the boyfriend thing, it was obvious he was still head over heels for her. Steve had talked to Jonathan a little during the days, trying to coax out any more information but he stayed tightlipped. Steve started to guess that he thought one of the teens Nancy hung out with was her boyfriend but from what little Steve saw, he didn't feel they were. There was definitely something weird keeping that group together but Steve doubted it was that.

On one night, Jonathan headed off with Will instead and Steve found himself alone. It made him realize he didn't really have any friends and now that he was by himself, he stuck out all the more. His feet moved from plank to plank but he couldn't bring himself to actually talk to anyone. He wondered if this was how Jonathan had always felt like at school, so close to coming in contact with someone but still so far away. Of course, Jonathan was comfortable as the loner, Steve not so much.

Maybe he just needed to get in the groove of things.

His fingers went over a leather jacket. He glanced around and looked down at himself, wondering if it was worth it. One look at the price tag said it wasn't and he started to move on again only to suddenly feel a heavy weight being thrown onto his shoulder.

Steve pulled it off, looking at it in confusion. It was the jacket but why... He started to turn around, his eyes recognizing the guy behind him only his eyes were quickly drawn elsewhere at the angry shout.

"Hey! Hey you have to pay for that!"

"Run!"

Steve felt himself being grabbed and suddenly he was running along the boardwalk, people getting pushed left and right as they ran onto the beach. He got pulled underneath one of the wooden piers, the lapping water finally louder than the boardwalk itself. The hand finally let him go and Steve latched onto three huge gulps of air.

He looked around first, noting how they seemed to be all alone and that the shop man hadn't followed. Finally he looked at the thief

himself, the ginger who was now pulling out a cigarette and lighting it.

“You...what was that all about?” gasped Steve.

“Oh come on pretty boy, don’t they have any fun where you come from?”

Steve finally stood up, wiping the sweat and his hair off his forehead. “Where I’m from, stealing is considered a crime. Not fun.”

“Live a little. And you’re welcome.”

Oh, he was still holding the jacket, wasn’t he? Steve looked at it, turning it round in his hands as he felt the eyes on him.

“Put it on.”

Ever so slowly, Steve pulled the leather over his arms, rolling his shoulders to adjust it and make it fit better. He smoothed it out a bit before he looked up again. He raised an eyebrow.

“Not bad. It’ll work with your bike better than your damn polos.”

Steve started. “You know I have a bike?”

“I’ve seen you around. Considering some of the staring I’ve felt on my back, I’m guessing you’ve spotted me around too.”

“Uh...well I mean...you guys are here every night,” Steve finally got out. Hold on, why was he trying to defend himself? There wasn’t any reason to.

Still, his response seemed to amuse ginger and the guy said, “The pipsqueak not with you?”

“His name’s Will. And no, he’s with his brother right now.”

“You make it sound like you’re not.”

“What?”

“His brother.”

“I mean-yeah. I am. I’m just adopted,” responded Steve.

The guy nodded in understanding. “So you get a night of freedom. Huh?”

“I guess.” He looked down again. “I don’t think it suits me.”

“Hmm, change up your hair a bit, a piercing...I think it suits you just fine.”

Steve just rolled his eyes. “What is with you guys and stealing? First Nancy with the photo and now you.”

Ginger shrugged. “It’s more enjoyable that way.”

“If you say so,” sighed Steve. “Um...how’s Max?”

Finally that smug look disappeared. “How do you know her name?”

“Because you yelled it at her when we met on the boardwalk,” sighed Steve.

“Oh, right. Well, what about you? What’s your name? It’s only fair I know the name of the person I just stole for.”

“It’s Steve. And you?”

“Billy.”

“Well, nice to meet you Billy.”

“Ha! You really do stick out like a sore thumb.”

“What? Should I have spit on my hand and cursed at you or something? Is that how you’re supposed to greet people in California?”

Billy laughed at that, grinning around the cigarette. He held out the pack and Steve took the offer. Placing it in his lips, he expected Billy to handover a lighter but he took a step forward instead, pressing the tip of his cigarette to the end of Steve’s. He inhaled on instinct and stared wide eyed, Billy seeming indifferent to the whole thing.

For a moment they just smoked, Billy leaning against one of the beams. Steve didn't know where to look and he was even more unsure of what to do. Billy seemed content with the silence but Steve felt like he had to say something. He certainly had a few questions in his head but he fell on, "So how is Max? You never actually said."

"Fine." The word was short and curt and didn't seem to have a ring of truth in it. "How's your little twerp?" Billy asked.

"Will. And he's good. He's been enjoying the city."

"Jonathan?"

"How do—"

"Nancy."

"Oh, right. He's good. I think anyways. He's kind of been wrapped up with Nancy. Is Nancy seeing anyone?"

Billy shook his head.

"Well Jonathan will be happy to hear that. He thought she had a boyfriend," Steve replied. He tried to think what to say next but all conversation pieces seemed to have left his head. He really wanted to ask what was with their odd group, where their parents were, why Nancy was with them. But Steve wondered if that was overstepping his boundaries. He may have been out of his element but it felt good finally talking with someone other than his family. He didn't want to give Billy a reason to run off.

"What's your take on the whole immortality thing?" Billy suddenly asked. It was an odd question but at least Steve didn't feel he could somehow screw up a theoretical talk like this.

"I mean, I don't know if you're thinking of some monster or whatever but just in general? At first it would be great. You could smoke and drink and probably eat whatever you wanted-if it's the kind of immortality where like, nothing changes in your body-but hell! It would be lonely as shit. And even if there was someone to spend it with, you'd probably get tired of them, you know? I mean, eternity with the same one or two people? I think I'd go insane." Steve shook



his head. “No, it would definitely suck-ah shit. I’ve been rambling. Sorry.”

Billy shrugged. His voice became carefully neutral as he replied, “Not a problem. You took the words right out of my mouth.”

“Um, yeah well...if you just take the time to look at it logically there’s not really another conclusion you could come to, you know? Unless you’re a heartless bastard who doesn’t care about people but I still imagine that would get lonely,” Steve said, faltering a little at the end. This talk was all make believe, probably just Billy trying to find a conversation starter, but his own responses seemed far too sad and genuine to make sense.

Steve tried to add more but the look on Billy’s face suggested he was done with the subject. The odd way he’d reacted had Steve uncertain of what to say in anything, theoretical or not. They turned back to silence, both almost finished with their cigarettes when Billy spoke again.

“Do you like California? I’m assuming you lived in a different state.”

“Uh, yeah. It’s way more sunny here and I never lived next to an ocean,” Steve replied.

“You could always count on a sunny day in Cali,” murmured Billy. He sounded almost forlorn, like he hadn’t seen it in a while. “For me, the ocean’s the best part though. It just goes on for miles and you can do so much shit in it. You ever really look at the ocean? Really? It puts things into perspective.”

The way that Billy was talking convinced Steve to turn around. Billy was right. He’d only thrown quick glances here and there at it but now he just looked, eyes slowly going from right to left. “It does seem to just disappear into the night. Like a warped mirror of the sky or something. It’s really something,” Steve softly agreed. He let out a soft sigh, just taking the image in. This quiet moment felt less awkward and more comfortable, at least until something seemed to change in the air.

The hair on the back of his neck started to stand on end and an

involuntary shiver ran up his back. Something in his head told him not to turn around. Don't fucking do it! His body was telling him to run, having skipped the fighting aspect and gone straight to flight. Fear rushed through his veins and the remnants of the cigarette fell from his lips as his mouth went dry. What was going on? Why was he trembling so much? Steve couldn't take it, the anxiety of this unknown feeling just building and building and—

He spun around despite all the warning bells that told him not to. However, all he saw was Billy in the exact same spot, still smoking his cigarette. His eyes were different though. It almost...there almost looked to be a tinge of yellow but...no Steve had imagined that. There was a difference in them, just not of color. Billy looked defeated. He looked even sadder for some unknown reason.

The fear Steve had been feeling disappeared. He stepped forward. "Billy—"

"Nothing good ever came from here," he replied with a sigh, dropping his cigarette and snubbing it out in the sand. "You should leave this city."

Steve wasn't sure whether to feel more insulted or just confused. "We-we can't. That house is all we have. The money we have is practically made day by—"

"That's not my problem. I gave you the advice so it's not like you can say I didn't. Take it or not. It's your choice," sighed Billy. "Hopefully I won't see you again."

"Hang on—wait. But you were just...Billy! He...he was right there," Steve sighed. All he'd done was blink and then poof! Just like that. Steve walked around in circles like he expected him to just appear again but he was gone, there weren't even footprints walking away in the sand. Only a dead cigarette rubbed into the sand showed that Steve hadn't imagined it all.

He stayed there a little longer. Waiting for what, he didn't know, but eventually he had to get back to the boardwalk and he started looking for Jonathan and Will. His eyes also looked for Billy or Max but neither appeared despite all the past times Steve had seen them

from afar.

In all actuality, he was so busy looking for Billy that he ran straight into Jonathan without realizing it.

“Woah, Steve. Steve! Are you alright?” asked Jonathan.

Steve glanced down as he felt Will tug on his sleeve. “You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“I...I’m just tired,” Steve got out.

“Maybe you’re getting sick,” murmured Jonathan.

“No, I’m seriously fine. It’s just been a long night,” sighed Steve. “I’ll probably just go home now.”

“Well we can come—”

Steve shook his head. “I don’t want to spoil your night.”

“I’m pretty tired too,” Will said. “I don’t mind going home already. Besides, I’m pretty sure I’ve scanned through every comic they have in that shop until they get a new shipment.”

Steve smiled back at Will’s earnest look but one glance at Jonathan... “I can take Will home on the bike. I even bought a helmet so he can wear it. If you’re ok with that Will.”

“It could be...fun,” Will admitted with a shy smile. He looked to Jonathan as did Steve, asking one final time for permission.

Jonathan hesitated. “I don’t mind leaving guys. It’s not like—”

“There you are. I was wondering if you’d be here tonight,” smiled Nancy. She seemed to appear out of nowhere, holding onto Jonathan’s arm as she looked at him.

Steve had to keep himself from laughing. Just from the way Jonathan’s shoulders relaxed showed that he’d probably been looking for her the entire night. Will nudged Steve in the side and Steve quickly said, “We’ll take the bike. It’s fine. Enjoy your night.”

“But—”

“Bye Jonathan!” Will called back.

Only once they were a few steps away did Steve let out a proper laugh. He was still mentally exhausted and confused, but whatever had happened under the pier he could push to the back of his mind now. “At least tell me he wasn’t like that all night.”

Will gave a small chuckle and shook his head. “No, he only really started trying to find her in the crowd about ten minutes ago. He really likes her though, huh?”

“From the looks of it, really really,” laughed Steve. “They need to go on something like a proper date or whatever, not just meet at the boardwalk at ten at night.”

Will made a face.

“Ah come on, dates can be fun,” teased Steve.

“No thanks,” replied Will. He stopped in his step though as they finally got to the parking lot and he saw the bike in the distance.

“Hey,” Steve gently said, “if you don’t want to, that’s fine. I can take you in Jonathan’s car and then come back and—”

“That’s just a waste of gas,” Will said. “I’ll be fine.”

“You sure?”

Will nodded. “But...you do have the helmet. Right?”

“Yeah, right here. Don’t worry about that. And I’ll go slow, ok kid?”

Will smiled and they headed into the parking lot and over to the bike. After Steve securely got the helmet on Will’s head, he helped the kid on the back and pulled his arms a little tighter around his middle.

“You weren’t wearing this before, right?” asked Will.

“Uh...no actually uh...Billy stole it for me.”

“Who’s Billy?”

“Ginger mullet guy. The maybe-brother of that kid Max.”

“Oh, you ran into him again?” asked Will.

“Something like that.”

“Why do people just steal whatever they like around here?”

Steve laughed. “I don’t think Billy or Nancy should be used as a basis for everyone here.”

Will seemed to mull it over in his head for a moment before he earnestly said, “Fair enough.” He was so honest it made Steve laugh again as he turned the motorcycle on.

He went slow through the city and even slower along the gravel path. He made sure that Will never thought he’d fall off and they made it to the house without having to pause once. Steve turned the bike off.

“Is it safe to get off now?”

“Yeah, it’s fine. You enjoy it?” asked Steve with a small smile.

Will nodded as he took the helmet off.

“Maybe we could go a little faster next time, huh?”

Will hesitated.

“Or maybe not. That’s fine,” chuckled Steve. He ruffled his hair and they walked inside. Joyce had been dozing off on the couch but she woke up as their footsteps sounded off the wooden flooring.

“Hi boys...oh. Where’s Jonathan?”

“He’s staying a little later,” Steve said just as Will added, “It’s an unofficial date.” Steve tried to cover Will’s mouth but he pushed Steve’s hand away. “Her name’s Nancy.”

“Oh is it?” Joyce asked with an amused smile. “And why hasn’t Jonathan told me anything about this Nancy?”

“She’s a friend,” Steve said.

“They make heart eyes at each other,” Will responded.

Steve rolled his eyes and picked up Will, tickling him furiously. Over Will’s laughter, Steve said, “You know, you’re terrible at secrets huh?”

“But we always tell mom everything!” Will managed to get out, still laughing between the words.

“And I thank you for that,” laughed Joyce. “Steve, stop torturing him.”

He put Will down, the kid playfully pushing him away as he looked up from under his bangs.

“I will say that I think for now, I can wait for Jonathan to tell me before I hear anymore about Nancy. Though I do hope to hear about her soon,” Joyce smiled. “Did he say when he’d be home?”

“No but you know Jonathan, he’s not a party animal,” chuckled Steve.

“Well, we’ll keep the porch light on for him.” Joyce let out a long yawn. “And I believe that’s my signal to go to bed. I’m guessing you both got food at the boardwalk?”

They nodded.

“Good. I’ll see you boys at breakfast then. Night.”

“Good night Mom.”

“Night Joyce.”

She headed up the stairs, Will following while Steve went and grabbed a late snack. He ate the cookies and walked around the first floor, almost expecting Jonathan to show up. Again, he wasn’t one

for staying out late and he was extremely protective over Will. Steve wouldn't be surprised if he put things on hold with Nancy just to hurry back home and make sure Will and him had made it safely.

After finishing the last one though, Jonathan still wasn't home and Steve couldn't help but smile. It seemed like he'd finally chosen to step out of his comfort zone.

Steve headed up to bed, wondering what stories he'd be able to wrestle out of Jonathan the morning after. He fell asleep quickly and —

That should have been it. He should have woken up, gone down stairs, ate breakfast, and teased Jonathan as much as he possibly could. Instead, he found himself being suddenly woken despite how the sun definitely wasn't up yet.

"Huh...why are you—"

"Steve, Steve do you have any idea where he could be? Please."

He rubbed his eyes, blinking away the light that had just been turned on. He looked at the clock. "It's three in the morning. Jonathan isn't home?" he asked after a moment, having to think about his words as his brain started to wake up with his body.

"No sweetheart. You said Nancy right? Do you know where Nancy lives? Where they might have gone?"

Steve shook his head. "He's probably just out late. Right?"

"That's not Jonathan though. I need to find him. He's never out this late."

"They-they were at the boardwalk. That's where we've seen her every time." When Joyce started to leave, Steve grabbed her arm. "Let me help! Let me—"

"No, you stay here in case he comes back. I only need one boy missing right now Steve," Joyce earnestly said.

She rushed out the door as Steve struggled to get to his feet. He

wanted to believe Joyce was just overreacting. Even if this wasn't in Jonathan's nature he was still a teenage boy. This wasn't abnormal. Yet the way she was acting, it was like there was more at stake than Jonathan just being late.

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Steve grabbed some clothes and got dressed as he heard Joyce's car speed down the road. After a moment longer he walked out of his room to see Will standing there and fully dressed.

"I'm guessing you heard most of that?"

He nodded.

"Want to help me look for him?"

"Mom wants us—"

"To stay here. I know. But I can't. Not with the way she was talking. It has me to worked up now," sighed Steve. "I'm going no matter what. But do you want to come with me?"

Will hesitated but his eyes gave Steve the answer. He took Will's hand and pulled him downstairs. "Come on. We should hurry."

---

Every time Billy caught sight of the kid and teen, he thought about killing them. Every night that passed by he thought about it and then he got his chance with the teen, with Steve. He could kill him and finally make peace with his former life. His actions would prove to his father that he knew himself to be better than any mere human.

It was so easy to pull him away from the boardwalk, from people. Just like that, they were alone and Billy could honestly do anything he wanted. It would be so easy to just walk up and rip his throat out. Yet words bubbled up instead, thoughts that were on his mind and still lingering bits of humanity. When Steve turned away though, Billy figured that was the sign. He could do this.

And he nearly did. His fangs were out and he was close enough to see the hairs rising on the back of his neck. The scent was ripe, so familiar now. One quick motion, too fast for Steve to stop it, and then



all of Billy's troubles would be over.

But then Billy had stepped back.

He couldn't fucking do it. And if he couldn't kill him then he sure as hell couldn't bring himself to kill the kid.

Billy had to leave. He disappeared.

God, if his father could see him now. His old man would kill him for sure. But at least his father didn't know about Steve and Will, not specifically anyways. Perhaps another kid, perhaps another person that didn't bring up feelings of the past for him. Perhaps he could kill someone like them, even if he couldn't actually do it to Will and Steve. Technically his dad didn't know about Jonathan either and he could have picked someone else for Nancy, but Billy had made a promise there. With any luck, the rest of Steve's family would take his advice and leave the city but that was all Billy could hope for.

He stayed away for almost half the night. Going by his watch, it was twelve when he finally convinced himself to return if only to look for Max. He found Nancy instead, right next to Jonathan, big surprise there. All the anger and confusion that was bubbling inside him at being unable to do as his old man wanted came forward. It influenced his actions, and he used the anger to at least complete this promise.

"Nancy. Jonathan. Party. Now."

Jonathan blinked, clearly thrown as he tried to speak. "I'm sorry—"

"I'm Billy. You clearly know Nancy already and you both are coming for a party. Now." He still kept his voice light but he made sure to phrase it in a way that left no room for argument.

Billy watched Nancy's eyes. He could see the plea, not now, not this. But if not now, then when? Billy stared at her, gaze constant. There would only be one end to this. The only choice Nancy had was how she was going to go about it.

A smile broke across her face. "A party," she agreed.

Jonathan shook his head. "It's late. I probably need to go home."

"Oh come on," begged Nancy, "please?"

With her poppy dog expression and cute looks, she was an utter natural. If only she didn't have such a big heart and had a feeding instinct closer to Carol, Billy imagined that there would be countless bodies behind her at this point.

Billy stood by, watching her convince him with kind touches and playful words. He could see it in her eyes. She needed it. Being surrounded by so many humans night in and night out was becoming too much. She needed to finally let go. She needed to feed.

Jonathan's last attempt was, "I only have my car. I can't go over sand \_\_\_\_"

"Nancy and you can take Carol's bike. She'll find another way home," Billy replied.

"It'll just be a little while," Nancy added again. "And small. Just us."

"Yeah, no big shindig. Just some fun," Billy said.

"Please?" Nancy repeated.

"I...I guess for a little while. I can't be long though."

"Great! Come on," Nancy said, pulling Jonathan along. Her tone suggested excitement but Billy could tell she was losing control, bit by bit. She hadn't lasted quite as long as Billy had expected but still an admirable amount of time.

Once they grabbed the bikes, it was just Billy, Nancy, and Jonathan racing across the sand and over to the cliff side.

Once there, Billy led the way and behind him he could hear Nancy giving Jonathan the same information he'd once given her. The history about the once grand hotel, the quake that occurred, how it had all come crashing into the ground. Billy stayed to the side as he watched Nancy and Billy move around. Now that they were here, he could see the doubt in Nancy again. She couldn't turn back now

though. She'd already jumped off the edge. At least Billy believed so.

She'd hesitate but that need was still there. She wouldn't be able to pull herself back now that the moment was upon her.

They walked around a bit, killing time before the others finally arrived

"Next time ask before you borrow my bike prep bitch!" yelled Carol.

Tommy was right behind her, Max too. She didn't look too pleased about having been left behind. She flicked Billy off for that.

Jonathan took a step back, clearly put off by the aggressive relationships. "I should—"

"No need to go. Carol's just being her usual bitchy self," snorted Billy. "Isn't that right Carol?"

"Fuck you Billy," she replied as she popped her bubble gum.

"Don't be too mean Carol," grinned Tommy. "We got ourselves a show tonight. Don't want to ruin it. Do we?"

"A show?" Jonathan asked.

"Come on Nancy!" yelled Tommy. "Let's hurry up already!"

Billy looked over to Nancy. She was so hungry. How would she do it? Just a quick slice of a nail, a bite? Would it be quick or slow? Merciful or brutal? They were all waiting, waiting for that first spurt of blood. Billy caught a glint of a fang. She was so close, she wouldn't be able to hold on—

"I can't do it."

Billy went cold, fury running through his veins in seconds.

Tears started to fall down Nancy's face. "I can't-oh...oh Jonathan I'm so sorry I can't." Jonathan looked on with wide, confused eyes but he held Nancy tightly despite it all. He hugged and kissed her forehead as she kept crying.

"I can't," Carol mimicked with an over the top voice. "I can't. I can't. I can't! God you are whiny!"

"Don't get so worked up Carol," Tommy laughed. "More for us. Right?"

He took a step forward but Nancy spun around in Jonathan's arms. She stepped away and held out her arms like somehow that would shield him from the coming pain. "Don't touch him! Don't you dare!"

"Nancy," Jonathan whispered. He sounded so damn fearful. Billy could tell that despite not knowing anything though, he was ready to grab Nancy and put her behind him. It would have been admirable if it wasn't so pointless.

Billy stepped forward. "You remember the promise, don't you? I can't just go back on that Nancy."

"Billy no! No please-someone else! Someone-just not him! I can't! Billy ple-don't!" Nancy's head went back and forth between Billy and the others. Her face fully changed, teeth out, eyes yellow. It was the first time Billy had seen her do so. He wished he could be proud, that she was finally just accepting things and making this easier but she wasn't. The action just made him angrier. Jonathan didn't react but then, from his position he couldn't see her face. "Don't you dare touch him!"

"Ah, look at Nancy. So protective of the blood bank," cooed Carol.

"No!" yelled Nancy. "Stop! I told you not to—"

Billy rushed her. He knew she'd try to stop him, but he was prepared. He dodged her meek attempts at attacks, shoving her off the ground and against a wall. He slammed her head there before he landed on his feet, her body falling as well. Her face slipped back to human, tears welling in her eyes.

"This is your last chance Nancy!" yelled Billy. He leaned over her, his lungs working overtime as his voice echoed against the rock. "Take it or leave it!"

"Nancy!" Finally Jonathan tried to run to them but Carol and Tommy

appeared beside him, holding him back. He still had no idea what was going on, yet his first instinct was to try and still help her. What a heart of gold, Billy tiredly thought.

Nancy pushed herself onto her elbows, one hand grabbing Billy's ankle as she tried to pull herself up and keep Billy from moving. "Billy don't—"

"Death and blood. Those are the only certainties in your second life Nancy," Billy shot back. He shook her off and stepped away. "I tried to give you some god damn dignity, give you at least some choice, but you couldn't take it! Now you're feeding whether you like it or not!"

Nancy tried to get up again but Billy knocked her back down. "Please-please don't—!"

Billy shot across the cave and grabbed Jonathan's head between his hands.

Snap.

So simple and quick. That was all humans were. Small breakable things.

*"No! Ahhh! No!!!"*

"Shut up!" yelled Billy.

His head whipped to the right, blood dripping from the cuts that suddenly appeared there. He looked back and saw Tommy and Carol reeling with bloody scratches on their faces as well. It wasn't Nancy. She was still on the ground with tears rolling down her cheeks. So if not any of them then... Understanding hit Billy.

"Max, no!"

Billy launched himself forward but she went just as quickly. All a blur to a normal eye but Billy watched her tear into her own veins before pressing her wrist to Jonathan's mouth.

The sound was deafening in his eardrums. There it was. Billy had

been so focused on Nancy but now he heard it, the heart still beating. He'd broken the neck but he hadn't killed him.

Billy slammed into Max, her small body flying against the wall and hitting it hard. Billy followed a second later, grabbing her by her jacket and lifting her off the ground. "Why would you do that!? Why!"

"I'm tired of doing this!" Max screamed. "I'm tired of killing people! I'm tired of hurting them!"

"You already accepted it! You know who you are. You know!" Billy slammed her against the wall again. Not Max. Not now. She was the closest thing to real family that he had left. She hadn't been weak like Nancy but she'd never wanted this like Tommy and Carol. She was the only one he could ever truly identify with despite the anger between them. He couldn't lose her too.

"I don't want it anymore!" Max screamed in response. "I don't want this! I don't—"

Tommy and Carol were yelling. Nancy was crying, and Max screaming. Billy continued to yell in her face, angry and confused and desperate, but all noise stopped as Jonathan jolted to. The blood had worked quickly to fix the broken neck and already Jonathan was able to scramble to his feet. He wiped Max's blood from his mouth just as Nancy rushed to him, protective again.

"Shit!" yelled Tommy. "This is just one fucking mess, isn't it?"

Billy closed his eyes and dropped Max to the ground. He couldn't deal with this. But there was still a chance. The vampire blood had healed the broken neck but it hadn't changed him, not yet. That took time and Billy could still kill him. He could fix this, force Nancy to feed, stop this from adding another unwanted member—

"And you disappoint again."

All his thoughts disappeared from his mind. He froze. Max was still in front of him, her body beginning to tremble as she looked around Billy. Everyone else turned and looked at the unknown voice but

Billy remained where he was, unable to accept what was happening.

“Who the fuck are you?” asked Tommy.

“A father. Come to reprimand his eldest son for being unable to fulfill his responsibilities.”

“Neil,” Max whispered. It was a statement, a desperate plea, a tortured moan. All fight had left her as she stared behind Billy with wide eyes.

“Maxine, how many times must I ask you to call me father?”

Carol made a face. “What are you? Some sick perve?”

Billy winced before the hit even fell. Max was prepared but everyone else not so much as they cried out in varying degrees of pain. Now that he was here, one fuck up meant they all fucked up. Apparently he was finally choosing to take charge. Billy finally turned around. Whatever was about to happen, looking away wouldn’t stop it.

“Next time you will show more respect. Clearly having Billy act as a leader was the wrong choice,” his father softly murmured.

“You’re the real leader?” asked Tommy. He pointed at Billy. “Then why the fuck have we been following him!”

“Because Billy needed to learn. It seems that Billy can’t be taught however,” sighed Neil. His eyes moved across all of them like he was teaching a class before he focused on Billy again. “You fail to follow my orders again and again. You fail to make Nancy feed and you bring another member into this family without my permission. You fail to keep those under you in line and every mistake you have made has doubled.”

Billy glanced at everyone else. They stared back, Tommy, Carol, and Nancy confused and still shocked by Neil’s existence. Billy looked to Jonathan. He tried to swallow and found his throat wouldn’t constrict.

“I can still kill him,” Billy managed to get out. “The blood hasn’t taken. I’ll make this right—”

"I think it's about time we've changed anyways," his father interrupted him. "Jonathan appears strong enough, he recovered quickly from the wound you inflicted upon him. You on the other hand, well I did promise. You've failed me for the last time and I think Jonathan would make the perfect replacement for a new son."

Max tried to move in front of him like some small shield but Carol seemed to have caught up with what this all meant. She grabbed Max with a wicked grin on her face, leaving Billy wide open for his father. "No!" Max screamed. "Billy!"

At speeds that even Billy couldn't reach, teeth went through his skin. Tendons ripped and red flew, the sharp fangs going deep enough to scrape his collar bone. A scream forced its way between his lips as he pulled away, part of his shoulder and neck going with it. It had been so long since Billy had felt any real pain. The last time he remembered hurting this much was that first and only time getting caught in the sun. The burns had still been surface level though, and the pain spread out. This was specific, pointed, and deep. This kind of pain told him there wouldn't be a second chance.

He was a doll and his father was ripping him apart at the seams.

Billy stumbled back, one hand trying to cover up the wound as his other found purchase on some bit of rubble. He tried to steady himself but his father was there again. Billy let go of the rubble, falling back and raising one arm in defense as he felt the teeth bite down again. Tissue and muscle pulled apart in long strings. The flesh finally snapped apart just as Billy fell to the floor. He could see his own bones as red splashed against the stone.

"Billy!" It was Max, still screaming, still calling out.

What would happen to her once he was dead? He'd failed her so many times and now this too? No way would his father keep his number one mistake alive.

The thought made Billy want to fight but as he tried to get up again, he felt his father's nails slicing through clothing and into his skin.

He didn't stand a chance, not back then and not now. He was going



to die. This was his last chance. All he could hope for now was that he didn't die by his father's hands. If there was only one end then Billy wouldn't give his father the satisfaction of striking the last blow. He pushed back, his father trying to strike him again.

Blood soaked into Billy's clothing, staining the rocks and his hands. He desperately back peddled and when his father was finally out of reach and unable to grab him, Billy pushed off and flew.

He went as far as he could, flying and then running when he couldn't do that. His paces slowed to an almost crawl until he finally fell against sand and rolled onto his back. His breathing labored on, blood slipping between his lips as he tried to cover the wound on his neck. It was like trying to put a butterfly band-aid over a shotgun wound. His hand just slid backwards and forwards over the wound. His arm was still bleeding too, dripping onto his shirt and making each twitch in his fingers more painful as his tendons tried to work. His stomach felt like knives were stuck in it with each breath so he finally had one hand slip down. His fingers immediately became wet and sticky.

His father's nails had cut deeper than Billy had thought. His hands moved over lumps and slimy pieces...his own innards slipping out. God he really wasn't going to make it. Vampire blood could work fast, heal a lot of things, but it wouldn't work quick enough for him to be able to move again before the end of the night. He was barely holding on as it was. If he was safe in the caves or somewhere else, he might have a chance of surviving the coming day. He could just fall asleep and let his body slowly pull himself together. But no, the sun was coming and Billy was too weak to move.

Sand, he knew he was surrounded by it, the grains getting into his wounds and making the slightest shift painful.

He could hear the water and see the night sky above him, even if it was too blurry for him to make out any stars. The grain he felt and the ocean, it filled his lungs with each breath that wracked his entire body. To be surrounded by this and then to die feeling the sun for one last time...Billy supposed he couldn't complain about that.

Though Santa Carla had only become home recently, he'd always

loved California and the coast. He'd missed swimming in the sun, playing basketball on the court, such normal things that were far behind him.

Billy took another shuddering breath, trying to keep his intestines from fully spilling out. His blood spread through the sand, a dark mass forming under him like some black hole, pulling him down and away.

The ending wasn't that surprising though, not really. It either couldn't have ended, not ever, or it would have ended violently and full of blood. His only regret was not being able to procure Max's safety before he went. If only he could do that...

Billy's eyes slipped shut, the night sky disappearing and the noises and feelings becoming distant. He held on to the good memories of California, the moments in the sun and the feeling of being alive before his dad had reappeared.

The good moments, he was fine dying with those thoughts as his last.

The sun approached.

## 4. The Truth

### Notes for the Chapter:

Thanks again for reading this! Changed it to five chapters instead six since this is just a fun, short little dip into the Lost Boys Universe. Anyways, thanks for reading and I'll have the last chapter out by next Tuesday!

This time Steve didn't bother Will about putting a helmet on or concentrate on the speed he was going at. Despite their own rationales as to why Jonathan wouldn't be around, Joyce's panic was starting to set into them and they hurried to the boardwalk as quickly as possible.

Steve stopped in the near empty parking lot. It seemed even the place had its closing times. Off to the side were a few empty vehicles, one of them Jonathan's car. He didn't see Joyce's and wondered if she'd already come here or if she was checking somewhere else. Maybe she was even going to the police, Steve couldn't be sure.

Part of him still wondered if this was all a little irrational but it was Jonathan and they were still new to the city. Something wasn't right.

"Ok," Steve murmured, "Ok I remember their bikes being parked on the beach once. They drove across the sand. Let's...let's check the beach and see if there's anything."

"What could we find?" asked Will.

"No idea. Tire tracks if the water or wind didn't erase them. Maybe they're having a bonfire and we'll be able to see it in the distance once we're down there," tried Steve.

"A beach house?" asked Will.

"I don't think there's any of those around here but...maybe. Come on."

They walked back towards the boardwalk before going off the

wooden paths and down the sandy hills. Steve looked left and right but didn't see any fire in the distance. Still, he doubted they went into the city considering Jonathan had left his car.

Steve picked a direction and they started walking. When the first five minutes passed and nothing came of it, his and Will's pace quickened. He didn't know what he'd expected to find. It was a large beach and despite his assumption that Jonathan hadn't gone into the city, Steve really had no way of knowing. He started to run with Will at his side, now desperate for anything. It was almost half past four. The sun would be up in an hour and maybe then he'd be able to see something. Once people started arriving at the boardwalk, maybe then he'd at least have witnesses to question, Jonathan could even show up again, but for now all Steve could do was keep running.

By now, his eyes had adjusted to the dark and off in the distance he spotted a form on the sand.

"Hey! Hey you!" It was probably some drunk but with any luck they'd at least be able to say whether or not a biker gang had headed this way.

Steve ran ahead of Will, but his pace started to slow once he saw the darker sand surrounding the body. Was that...water?

Above him, the clouds lazily drifted by, the moon more clearly shining along the beach. The black spots glistened and Steve got a better look at the guy.

"Will don't look!" It was his first instinct, turning around and trying to cover Will's face. His own eyes couldn't move away though. "No! No don't look! Oh god...oh god—"

"He's still breathing!" Will shouted, pulling down Steve's hands as he looked with wide eyes.

"What?" Steve spun back around. "That's..."

The guy should have been dead with that much blood loss but Will was right. His chest was still moving, rising and falling in irregular patterns. Steve rushed to the guy's side, trying to figure out what to

do. What little medical knowledge he knew said the guy was going to die no matter what he did but he had to try.

Ok, a wound on the neck, the arm, his-Steve covered his mouth-his intestines spilling out. Steve looked to the face. Holly hell, it was—

“The guy from the boardwalk,” whispered Will. Steve took several deep breathes. He had to think about this. He had his bike. No way could he take this guy anywhere on that but Jonathan’s car was still here. Ok... “Will, here’s a spare key to the car. I want you to run back and get it started. You can do that, right?”

Will gave a quick, shaky nod. He snatched the keys from Steve’s hands and took off across the beach. Steve turned back to Billy. He put one arm under Billy’s legs and the other around his back. He was heavy and there were other ways that would have been easier to carry him but not with the way his stomach was.

Billy was going to die in his arms. Steve was sure he’d feel that last shudder, hear that last gasp of air. He expected to look down and see him still but he kept breathing and Steve pushed himself to keep walking.

“Don’t—”

The whispered word almost caused Steve to drop him.

“No-no hospital. Don’t-don’t take—”

Steve shook his head. “I have to. If you even make it to the hospital.”

“Don’t...no...hospital...”

Steve tried to argue back but something kept him from doing so. His mind tried to convince him otherwise. A hospital could help him. What the hell could Steve do! But the harder he thought about it, the more he knew he couldn’t and the rationales for doing so just slipped away like there was an invisible hand at work. He couldn’t go to the hospital so where? He had to help Billy but the only place he could think of was home...

He’d have to go there then. Billy was a part of Nancy’s group so if

Steve saved him, maybe he could tell them where Jonathan was. He tried not to think about the possibility of this having happened to Jonathan too. No, he had to stay positive. Jonathan was ok, Billy would be ok, and Steve what find out what the hell was going on!

By the time he got back to the parking lot the sky was beginning to change and become lighter. God, it had taken ages to get across that beach.

Will jumped out of Jonathan's car and rushed over.

"Will, I'm going to need you to get in the back with him. Try and keep pressure on the wounds. Can you do that?"

Will nodded.

"Ok, ok let's hurry."

He put Billy in the back, closing the door behind Will before he jumped in the front.

"Do you know where the hospital is?" asked Will.

"We're not going to the hospital."

"What! We have to!" cried Will.

A small part of Steve tried to agree with Will but that part was quickly crushed. "No, no we're going home."

"That doesn't make sense—"

"We're going home!" He rubbed his eyes as he sped out of the parking lot. "Christ I'm-I'm sorry Will just-god I don't know what to do!"

Will was silent for a moment, his eyes flitting back and forth in a panic as he tried to find an answer. He cried out, "Mom could help! She always helps!"

Steve just nodded. Joyce, she was the adult here. She'd know what to tell Steve.

With that in mind, he drove all the faster. It was a quarter past five. The sky was getting lighter outside, the dark colors turning lighter shades of blue.

He drove up the gravel path and slammed to a stop in front of the house. Joyce's car was there. Good, that already gave him more confidence as he shot out of the car and opened the back seat. "Will, go find Joyce. I'll be right behind you."

Will nodded, getting out of the ruined seat. His hands were as soaked in blood as Steve's and yet one look at Billy showed he was still kicking. It would have been incredible if Steve wasn't so damn terrified. Steve pulled Billy out, getting him in his arms again before hurrying to the house, still hearing Will's cries for Joyce. She was here, right?

Steve kicked the door open. "Joyce! Joyce we need help!"

He started to go up the stairs figuring that whatever they needed, setting the guy on a bed would be the best place for him. Will passed him going down, still yelling for Joyce just as the stairs to the attic suddenly fell. Steve jumped at the noise before running the rest of the way to the top.

"Joyce—woah! Woah what the hell happened to you!" yelled Steve.

"Mom!" Will cried out, running up the stairs again. However, he froze to a stop next to Steve. "Mom, are you hurt—"

"I'm fine," Joyce replied despite the blood her arm was drenched in. She hefted up the crossbow in her arms and pointed it right at Steve.

"Joyce! What are you—"

"Sweetheart, I know you don't understand right now but I need you to drop him and step away."

"I-I-I what the hell is going on!" yelled Steve.

Joyce took a careful step towards Steve. "I'll explain later but what you need to know is he is dangerous and I need you to put him down."

“He’s dying!” cried Steve.

“No, but he will,” Joyce said. There was a steely look in her eyes that Steve had only seen once before. He remembered it. Remembered sitting in school with a black eye next to Jonathan. It had been the first time they hadn’t fought each other but together. Some kid had spoken ill about Steve’s parent and when Steve had frozen, Jonathan had acted and Joyce had never been prouder of her son for sticking up for Steve. The boy that had started it though, Joyce had given him a look that said she would do anything to protect her kids and from then on, that included Steve too.

That look was on Joyce’s face now and it just confused Steve all the more.

“He may know where Jonathan is!” Steve cried out. It was the only thing he could think to stop Joyce.

“He does?” Joyce asked, finally easing up on the crossbow.

“Nancy’s part of his group and Jonathan would have went with her!” Steve quickly said. “Billy might—”

“Will, I need you to go into Steve’s room and close all the blinds and curtains. Not a bit of sunlight can get in. Can you do that baby?”

Will gave a shaky nod.

“Alright sweetheart, hurry,” Joyce murmured.

“What-what the hell are you talking about?” Steve asked. Sunlight? That didn’t make any sense. Why was she worried about that?

“I’ll explain it to you,” Joyce said, finally dropping the crossbow and walking over. “I promise. Now, when Will’s done, take him in there. I’ll be right back.”

“O-ok.” Steve didn’t know how to feel. The woman who’d been his mom for over five years had just pointed a crossbow at him and threatened the life of the guy in his arms. Yet even after that, Steve had to trust her. Before now, she’d never given him a reason to doubt her, even if right now he was confused as hell.



Joyce hurried downstairs and when Will popped out with a thumbs up, Steve quickly rushed in and placed Billy on the bed. Light could be seen behind the curtains but none actually entered the room. Will turned the light on so they could better see.

For a moment, Steve could only panic, still having no idea what he was supposed to do. It looked like the bleeding had slowed but the wounds still should have meant a death sentence.

He looked up when he heard footsteps. The crossbow was across Joyce's back now as she moved forward with gauze in her arms.

"Wait," said Steve. "Shouldn't we like-like clean them and-and stitch the wounds and—"

"He'll heal on his own time. Keeping pressure will help it along but doing anything else will just hinder it," Joyce responded. "And those blinds won't work all day. Will, grab some sheets and throw them over."

"Wait-wait hold on!" yelled Steve. He would say things were beginning to click into place but it still didn't make any sense. "You're not-I mean-Joyce you-oh my god has everyone gone crazy!"

He waited for some kind of answer, for any kind of response. Will kept looking back at his mom with wide eyes as he covered up the windows better. Finally Joyce seemed content with the bandages and gestured for them to come close. "Boys, when I started telling you about my father and my time in Santa Carla, I wasn't very honest."

"Mom, what's going on?" whispered Will.

All Steve could think was one word and he begged for Joyce not to say it. Not vampires. Not vampires. This didn't have to do with vampires because they weren't real and this was crazy and—

"Most cities, like Santa Carla, harbor a certain number of the undead," Joyce murmured.

Oh god she was going to say it!

"Some remain rogues, others form clans, groups, families, whatever

they call them,” murmured Joyce. “This teenager is a vampire.”

Steve shot up. “No! Oh no he’s not because-because that’s insane and-and there has to be a logical explanation—”

“I should have told you boys sooner,” Joyce murmured.

“What-what do you mean?!” cried Steve. “Vampires aren’t real!”

“Mom,” whispered Will, “is that why you have the crossbow and... and are covered in blood?”

Steve tried. “Will this isn’t real—”

“That’s why I didn’t want you boys up in the attic,” Joyce murmured kindly. “That’s where my dad kept his tools. His records. He kept me safe as a kid and managed to eradicate them from the area. I thought it was safe but clearly I was wrong. I’m so sorry. I should have told you from the beginning.”

“So you think a vampire took Jonathan?” whispered Will.

“No! Will stop-no!” cried Steve. “This-don’t tell me you’re—”

This time he was cut off by a scream. Billy rolled over, his arm bursting into flames just as one of the sheets slipped from the window and the curtain was pulled down. Will rushed across the room, covering up the sunlight again just as Joyce stood up and pulled the crossbow into her hands. Steve watched as the flames flickered away, Billy’s face contorted with pain as fangs appeared beneath his grimace.

“Urgh where...the fuck am I?” Billy groaned. He curled into himself before glancing around, the fangs retracted now. His brow contorted in confusion.

Steve tried to get out a word. “You’re-you’re-you’re-you’re—”

“What are you trying to say?” growled Billy.

“You’re a vampire!”

“Yeah.”

“What do you mean yeah!?” yelled Steve. “This is—”

“Please just stop yelling,” Billy mumbled. “I just want to sleep.”

“No, you’re not going to,” said Joyce as she stepped forward, crossbow raised. “You’re going to tell me who the head vampire is. You’re going to tell me how many of you there are and where your clan is. And you’re going to tell me where my son is or I swear I’m going to throw you out that window.”

“Woah,” whispered Will. “Go Mom.”

The room was silent for a moment until Billy started to laugh, pained and tired. “That’s what he was so worried about. The fucking danger is a damn vampire hunter.”

“No,” Joyce evenly replied, “that was my father. I’m a concerned, working mother who wants to know where the hell her son is.”

Steve’s back hit the wall. He hadn’t even realized he’d been backing up until it happened. He slid to the ground, pulling at his hair. “Oh... oh god it’s real.”

“I’m so sorry Steve,” murmured Joyce. “I wanted to keep you boys safe but I should have told you from the beginning.”

Steve shook his head. This was hard to understand, to even believe despite the facts in front of him. However, what mattered most was finding Jonathan and if Billy had any information about that...

“Did you find a-a vampire?” Steve finally asked Joyce.

“I did but he didn’t have any information. He was a loner.” She turned back to Billy. “I’m assuming you’re not.”

Billy shook his head.

“Do you know where my son is? Is he still alive?” whispered Joyce.

Billy nodded.

“And was he turned?”

“Last night,” whispered Billy. “And no, I’m guessing he hasn’t fed yet. You can probably kill the old man and you’ll get your boy back.”

“You’re not very loyal to him,” Joyce murmured, her brow knitting together.

“He doesn’t have a use for me. Not anymore,” whispered Billy. “Besides, I know...and you know...that you can kill me without a second thought if I don’t cooperate. But I’m asking for a deal.”

“What deal?”

“When you go for Jonathan, I need you to get Max too,” whispered Billy. “Red hair. Little twerp. Can’t miss her.”

“Has she been turned?”

He nodded.

“I can’t help her,” Joyce said. “She won’t turn back to human.”

“I already know that,” Billy replied. “But she’s my responsibility and if-if my dad hasn’t killed her already then I need you to save her for me. Otherwise I’m not telling you where they are.”

“Your father?” asked Joyce.

“He’s the head vampire. And before you ask no, it’s not some stupid thing he made us do. Not for me at least. He’s my actual father.”

Steve watched as something changed in Joyce’s eyes. It wasn’t pity but some form of understanding that Steve wasn’t following. He was still trying to convince himself that this wasn’t a dream.

“Tell me what you know Billy, about the head vampire, about your place, everything,” Joyce murmured as she sat on the side of the bed and relaxed.

Steve pushed himself up and walked closer. He listened to the crazy but he tried to believe it because Joyce believed it and Steve did trust

Joyce. He hugged Will for support though, Will doing the same as they listened to everything Billy had to say about Max and Nancy and Jonathan and his father and the two others he was seen with, Tommy and Carol.

It seemed like Billy had given them all the information they needed except for where his father lived. It seemed his father hadn't even trusted Billy with that knowledge. However, something had changed on Joyce's face throughout the story and apparently she needed more. "I'm going to ask you three questions Billy. I want you to answer honestly. How many people have you killed?"

"I...I don't know," Billy sighed. "I lost count. Probably...I'd imagine over two hundred by now."

"But no kids was your rule," Joyce stated.

Billy nodded.

"When did your father turn you?"

"About a year ago. He...he left when I was three, must have gotten turned sometime down the road. He came back when I was sixteen, had killed his maker, become a head vampire by then. He asked first. I didn't really believe him but I told him to go screw himself all the same," Billy murmured. His knuckles tightened, turning white as he closed his eyes and made slow, wheezing breathes. "He...I told him he didn't count as my dad the moment he abandoned me. He told me I'd always be his son, now and forever. Then he turned me."

Steve's heart clenched at that.

Joyce asked her final question. "We may be able to take both Carol and Tommy but your father will come for revenge tonight. He'll come for us and when he does, I need to know, will you help us?"

"You kill Max and I'll kill your entire family, but if she is still alive and you get her out of there, protect her...if...if you help her...yeah. Yeah I don't have a single problem killing my own dad," murmured Billy.

Joyce turned away, biting her lip and restlessly bouncing her foot.

“What?” murmured Billy. “Having second thoughts?”

“No...no there may be a way...”

Joyce got up and started to leave.

“A way for what? Hey lady, a way for what!” Billy groaned as his head hit the pillow, Joyce gone and Will following her.

Steve remained frozen though and eventually Billy turned to him.

“Bet you weren’t fucking expecting this.”

Steve shook his head. So many thoughts ran through his head. Yesterday, his life had been normal and his biggest worry was the upcoming school year. Now his world had turned into blood and mayhem.

A thought came to Steve’s head. “I...I was going to take you to the hospital. But you told me not to. And I couldn’t. Like any thought of it, no matter how rational, got crushed.”

“Did I say that? I don’t remember,” sighed Billy.

“But that was you. That was keeping me from going to the hospital.”

Billy gave a slight nod. A small smile played on his lips. “Don’t worry. I can’t mind control you or anything. It’s more like heavy suggestion. Wears off pretty quickly.”

“Shit. You really are a vampire,” groaned Steve. He put his head in his hands for a second. It fully sunk in, this messed up reality. There was no getting out of it. So since Billy was a vampire, then... “Were you going to kill me? Out under the pier?”

“That was the plan,” murmured Billy.

“Why didn’t you?”

“I’m weak. Too much human still left in me.”

“How’s that weak?”

“Because it’s gotten me here,” murmured Billy.

Steve shook his head. “If you’d killed me, I couldn’t have saved your ass on the beach.”

“Hmm, maybe. But then perhaps shit wouldn’t have gone south with Jonathan.”

“You were seriously trying to kill him?”

“It’s the only way I can survive,” Billy said. “The only way any of us can. Jonathan and Nancy, maybe they’ll get a second chance if you’re successful but not me. Not Max. Either I kill or I am killed. There isn’t another—”

“I’ve got it!” Joyce yelled, rushing back in with Will at her side and a massive book in her arms.

“What the hell is that?” asked Steve.

“My father’s research notes. There was one point where he tried something...” Joyce licked her fingertips and quickly flipped through the pages.

“Good god. Has hunting vampires been your life’s work or some shit?” asked Billy.

“My father’s,” repeated Joyce. “I simply grew up here.”

“Never met a vampire hunter,” Billy mumbled.

“Working mom.”

“Never met a working mom that’s a part time vampire hunter,” snorted Billy.

Even Steve couldn’t help but laugh at that. The humor in his statement was the only normal part of all this. Joyce ignored it though, stopping at one page with a sad sigh. “This will be difficult... but you’d do anything for Max. Wouldn’t you?”

Billy hugged his stomach, pushing himself up on one hand. “What

have you got?"

"Well, we're not going to be able to kill Neil. Not right away. We would need him to help turn you and Max back."

Billy blinked. "Are...are you serious? But-that's not possible!"

"I mean, my father only tried it twice," Joyce winced. "One of the subjects made it. The other exploded."

The wonder and disbelief went out of Billy as he rolled his eyes. "Well that sounds safe."

"But there's a chance," Joyce continued. "Your decision changes where we go from here."

"Why would you help me?" asked Billy. "You were pointing a crossbow at me only a second ago!"

"Because I will do anything to keep my family safe," Joyce replied. "I will always do anything to keep them safe. But that doesn't mean you can't have a second chance. Besides, most choose this life. They revel in their new freedom."

"I didn't say I didn't enjoy killing," Billy murmured.

Silence came back over the room and Steve watched Joyce get a curious look on her face. He supposed it had something to do with that motherly instinct and what Billy had just told them. He definitely wasn't a perfect person or maybe even a good person but Steve found that he wanted to help him and Max as much as he wanted to go rush in and rescue Jonathan.

"No..." murmured Joyce. "No, if that was true you would have killed Steve when you had the chance. You wouldn't make rules."

Billy tried to shoot up at that but his wounds had the anger switching immediately to more pitiful noises and looks. "You don't know me!" The words were probably meant to sound strong and bitter but they just came out broken and pained.

As Billy collapsed back against the sheets, Joyce placed a hand over



his. "I think I do," Joyce softly murmured. Before Billy could respond, she stood up, slung the crossbow back over her back, and said, "Steve, there are weapons upstairs. Grab what you can. You're coming with me. Will, you're staying here—"

"But Mom—!"

"No! No buts, you are not going in that cave," Joyce closed the book and handed it to Will. "I want you to find all the ingredients in here. Steve and I will be back soon with your brother and the others."

"What about me?" asked Billy as he pushed himself into a sitting position.

"It's daytime. Go to bed and heal up as much as you can. We'll need you when your father comes," said Joyce.

Billy collapsed again with an annoyed sigh. It was all he could say, Joyce being completely right.

"We need to go now," Joyce added. "Better to get them as soon as possible so that way we have enough sunlight left to prepare. Let's go!"

They all kind of jolted at that, Steve rushing off to the attic. He had to pause as he realized the extent to Joyce's dad's job. It seemed vampires had been his whole life. Once his eyes had scanned everything, he grabbed a machete, a flashlight, and a pouch of water marked "holy". Steve had always thought a stake was how to slay a vampire though of course, that was back when he'd thought they only existed in movies and books. Going by the state of the machete, it had been used often and Steve supposed no matter what you were, a blade through the heart or a lopped off head was effective.

Steve shook his head again. God, how was this his life?

Running back downstairs, he gave Will a quick hug before going to the car and jumping in. He buckled up as Joyce drove and he asked, "Aren't you afraid of leaving Will in there?"

"Billy can't move from that room if he doesn't want to risk sunlight. Besides, I made sure Will would stay downstairs."

“But you wouldn’t have done it period if you didn’t somehow trust Billy. Right?” asked Steve. “I don’t understand how you’re doing that.”

“Because no matter what that boy’s said, I know he didn’t want this life,” Joyce pressed. “He’s trying to live with what he does, pretending he enjoys it, but he doesn’t. I’ve seen the look before.”

“You’ve...who?”

“An old high school friend,” murmured Joyce.

“Was he the one that survived? The people that your dad tried to help?”

Joyce nodded. “It’s been so long...I haven’t talked to Hop in ages. I’d almost forgotten about all that, and it’s pure luck I discovered that book again.”

“Even though the other subject exploded.”

“It’s the only chance they have,” sighed Joyce. “I won’t force them though. It’s still their choice.”

Steve gave an unsteady nod, tightening his grip on the handle of the machete. They didn’t really drive into town but more on the outskirts, eventually finding the road Billy had mentioned. It was almost indiscernible from the rest of the ground. Joyce did a sharp left and it took about five more minutes until they hit the coast.

The warning signs and stairs were old, paint flakes drifting off and a million waiting splinters.

“Stay behind me sweetheart.”

“Seriously? But—”

“Steve, I know what you’ve mostly seen of me is cooking you breakfast and working behind a register but trust me, I know what I’m doing,” Joyce said, that steely look in her eyes again. Steve had no idea what was waiting for them or what would happen but he did know they’d get Jonathan back, even if it was the last thing she did.

Steve followed her down the rickety steps. His heart raced as they came near a main opening. He thought about how the vampires would probably be able to sense that. He tried to calm it. It only made his blood pump faster.

The sun was still relatively low meaning that the main opening was largely lit up. Steve could tell the remnants of a building were there, surrounded with many other smaller trinkets that had just been thrown about.

His eyes quickly darted to the side. A flicker of movement and he immediately had the machete raised but Joyce gently pushed his hands back down. Oh, right. There was sunlight here. It couldn't be Max or the other two. It had to be...

A curtain was pushed to the side. Nancy sat there, dark purple splotches up and down her arms.

"Steve?" she whispered. She sounded so fearful and lost.

Joyce slipped her crossbow away and careful approached. "Oh god, what did he do to you sweetheart?"

Nancy wiped at her eyes before Steve could even see tears fall. "My arm, he broke it in four places for protecting Jonathan. For not feeding."

"Broke-but it's only bruised—" tried Steve.

"They heal quickly," Joyce replied as they moved over the rubble to the second landing.

"If you know-if you know, then Billy...is he alive?"

Steve nodded. "We're here for you and Jonathan. And Max. It was the deal."

"And you're their mom?" whispered Nancy.

Joyce nodded.

Nancy moved out of the way so that they could finally see Jonathan.

She shook him awake as Steve and Joyce finally rushed forward.

“Mom? Steve?” Jonathan finally sat up. He automatically felt his face and seemed shocked when nothing came away.

“It already healed,” Nancy gently said.

Jonathan shook his head. He looked like he’d woken from a bad dream only to find himself in a worse nightmare. His eyes alighted on the machete and crossbow and the blood still on Joyce’s clothes. Steve fully understood how he felt.

“Mom, I’m so sorry. I didn’t—”

“Shh, you’re safe now. You’re safe sweetheart. I’ll help you,” murmured Joyce. “But I need you both to get to the car now. It’s up on the cliff side. Nancy, do you know where Max is?”

“Back in the cave I...I never really went back there but I know you need to head left. Head right and you’ll find Tommy and Carol.”

“Mom,” whispered Jonathan, “we should—”

“No, both of you get out now. Hurry, we’ll be out soon. I promise.”

Jonathan looked like he didn’t believe her and Nancy’s fearful look didn’t really make Steve feel anymore confident about the situation.

“Go, hurry,” Joyce urged. She kissed her son on the forehead and pushed him off. “Hurry.”

She turned to go deeper into the caves, Steve quickly following before Jonathan could argue. They moved carefully, afraid to make a sound and having to almost crawl through some parts. They went left like Nancy had told them, going a little deeper before their flashlights moved over Max.

Ok, so seeing the little kid, with vamp feet and slightly bared fangs really was the final nail in the coffin. No pun intended. She was up high, too high to reach, so Steve grabbed a stone and hoped her instinct wasn’t to immediately slash their throats. He threw it at her chest and her eyes popped open immediately. She jumped down, her

face shifting to what Steve was more used to, the yellow slipping away.

Now that she was nearer, Steve saw the light bruises on her face, going down her neck. He remembered what Nancy and Joyce had said, and it made Steve wonder exactly what Billy's dad had done to her too.

Steve put his machete down, hands up just in case. Besides, Joyce could watch his back if Max acted too quickly. "Billy's alive. He asked us to get you," Steve urgently whispered.

Max's eyes went wide, desperately wanting what Steve said to be true. "How?"

"We'll tell you later. We need to hurry," Steve said.

"But the sun's up. I can't leave."

"We'll wrap you up, keep you safe the entire way," Joyce murmured. "We have a plan but we'll explain it when we're safe."

Max looked uncertain. "And Billy's there?"

"Found him on the beach when I was looking for Jonathan," Steve quickly said. "Managed to get him home before the sun was up. He's ok."

Max waited a few seconds before nodding. She finally approached when suddenly her eyes flitted away. Steve suddenly crashed to the side, the light of the flashlight going wild. Flashes of faces and eyes and fangs appeared in the dark. Joyce's crossbow went off and along with it came an enraged screech.

Blood splattered against Steve's face as he forced open the pouch of holy water. He caught sight of that one teen, the one named Carol, and tossed it as quickly as she could. More horrific screeching as bloody boils appeared and popped, tearing through the skin and muscle. Carol took a step closer though, fangs elongated and mouth wide open.

Suddenly, another arrow flew. It struck her in the chest. Her entire

body shook, the scream echoing across the cave walls. The noise mixed with another arrow going off though Steve couldn't tell where it landed. All he heard was more screaming. Then Steve just barely caught sight of Max grabbing the rest of the bottle of holy water, rushing over and dumping it on Carol's head. The tone and pitch of the screaming changed, the volume growing louder as Steve managed to get to his feet.

He grabbed his flashlight and the machete, not that there was much need for it now. He moved closer to Carol, the scream finally diminishing as her face melted away and only the skull was left. Steve moved his flashlight away and saw that Tommy had gotten both arms ripped off, presumably by Max, and had two bolts right in his heart.

From what Joyce had said, she definitely wasn't a vampire hunter yet the accuracy made Steve wonder if she'd kept up practice over the years. Talk about a good shot though.

Steve wondered if his nonchalant feelings about the whole bloodbath was because he was honestly getting used to this fucking weird world or if he was in shock.

"Well we're safe now," Max said with a frustrated sigh. She tucked her hair behind her ears before she turned to look at Joyce and Steve. "Tell me your plan."

Steve supposed it didn't matter where they told her. It would take time away from prepping the house anyways. He started to look for sheets and blankets while Joyce gave her a quick rundown of everything that had happened. Steve went back into the main cave too, grabbing more items to further protect Max before heading back into the dark.

When he got back, going by Max's face, Joyce had told her the fact that she had a way to turn them back to human. Max clearly didn't believe her. She shook her head but still relaxed all the same. "Billy's with you. That's what matters." She looked over to the mass of fabric in Steve's hands. She rolled her eyes. "So I'm becoming a burrito. Is that it?"

“It’ll work, right?” asked Steve.

“Should,” Max said.

Steve bit his lip, somewhat worried about what could happen if they went into the sun and this wasn’t enough protection. Of course, they wouldn’t know until they actually walked out there so Steve started to lay the pieces of fabric on the ground before he gestured for Max to lie down. He then began to wrap the pieces around her, making sure every bit of skin would be covered no matter what and so that she had multiple layers between her and the sun. Before he did her face though, he asked, “You ok?”

“Something tells me this is going to be hot and uncomfortable. But I’m ok,” Max sighed. “I don’t have to breathe either so you don’t have to worry about that.” She nodded and Steve wrapped her face and hair up too. A little mummy covered in wraps and blankets.

Steve gently picked her up. While he’d done that, Joyce had recovered her arrows and grabbed the holy water bottle along with hooking the machete onto her belt. He looked to her to make sure she was done before carefully moving out of the cave. It was harder with a kid in his arms but Steve made sure not a single piece of clothing fell away.

The sun had risen by the time they were in the main entrance. There was less direct sunlight entering the cave but Steve still paused a few times just to make sure Max didn’t make a noise of discomfort or suddenly burst into flames.

Nothing happened though by the time they were at the entrance and actually in sunlight so he doubled his pace. He went up the stairs and headed to the car, Jonathan quickly sitting upright and shielding his eyes.

“What happened! You were-is that blood!”

“Ran into Tommy and Carol. Don’t worry, your mom took care of it,” Steve said as he situated Max. Nancy was fast asleep next to him before he jumped into the passenger’s side and Joyce in the driver’s.

“You-mom you seriously just killed them?” asked Jonathan.

“Wasn’t much of a choice,” Joyce sighed as she sped back down the dirt road. “If we hadn’t then, then they would have come for us at night. Now we at least only have one to deal with.”

“Even though he’s a head vampire,” murmured Steve.

“There’s still only one of him,” Joyce replied.

---

Billy could feel himself going in and out of consciousness, so ready for death, barely remembering the last thing he’d said. And then he’d woken up in some house with Steve standing there, covered in his own blood.

Billy had told them so much. Everything really. He still couldn’t believe he’d done that, another moment of weakness his father could call it. But Steve had a point. If he had killed him, no one would have found him out on that beach.

And despite having his throat pulled out, his arm ripped apart, his intestines nearly torn from him, and then burned by the sun on top of that, somehow he’d still survived. What a huge ‘fuck you’ that was to his dad. Even if this all failed and went to shit, at least Billy would be able to get to see the look of shock on his dad’s face when they saw each other again.

After Steve and Joyce left, Billy dozed off again. However, he woke at the smell of that kid, Will, coming upstairs. Billy rolled over, blearily opening his eyes to see the kid standing at the door. He didn’t get closer, not that Billy would hurt him but it was a smart move all the same.

“Still trying to believe this is all real. Huh?”

Will shrugged. “Not really. Is that weird? I can just accept this?”

“You’re a kid. Kid’s are good at just accepting things as they come.”

“You’re a kid too though. Right? I mean you were bitten at sixteen but you’re technically only seventeen now, right?”



“Childhood got cut short. I do eat people you know,” Billy sighed.

“What’s that like?”

“Yummy,” Billy sarcastically replied. “You’re damn morbid aren’t you?”

“I just...I’m curious. I’ve been reading my granddad’s notes,” Will replied. “He didn’t seem to like vampires very much.”

“Plenty of reason not to.”

“You seem ok though.”

“Ok?” Billy couldn’t help but laugh, even if the action hurt like hell. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Will shrugged, his head whipping away as they both heard a car coming up the driveway. “They’re back!”

Billy pushed himself up on the pillow. He anxiously wanted to run down but forced himself to stay still. He could just barely hear a door opening downstairs and voices. Fear gripped his heart when no one immediately came up the stairs. What if they’d failed? What if Tommy and Carol had stopped them? Or what if they were all dead? Max and Nancy and Jonathan and—he’d kill him. Billy no longer cared that he’d fail. That he’d die. As long as he took that son of a bitch father of his down for hurting Max he’d do it—

Steve appeared in the doorway. Billy blinked away the angry tears as he focused on him and the bundle in his arms.

“What the hell is that?” growled Billy.

Steve rolled his eyes as the bundle wiggled and Steve started to pull off some of the blankets. One sniff and Billy knew who it was. Relief filled his chest as Max’s red face appeared with a sour, expression. “Me asshole. Who else?”

Billy pushed himself up as quickly as he could and snatched Max up, falling back on the bed.

“At least unwrap me asshole!”

Billy just laughed, kissing her forehead and pulling her close. “I was worried you were dead!”

“Me!? You had your intestines ripped out!” yelled Max as she struggled and at least managed to get her arms out. She hit him in the chest. “I thought you were gone! You were dead and gone and I \_\_\_”

“I know! I know; I’m so sorry Max. I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” Billy replied. He hugged her close and after a few moments of her trying to push him away, she finally hugged back too.

## 5. Here Comes The Sun

### Notes for the Chapter:

And here comes the last chapter! It was a lot of fun to play around with this idea and a great excuse to go back and re-watch *The Lost Boys*. Thank you for reading and the kudos and comments and I hope you enjoy this last chapter!

Billy fell asleep, this time far more content and relaxed than he'd been before. When he woke up, it was because of Max getting restless in his arms. He slowly pushed up, pulling at the bandages and seeing that his skin had knitted together again. The areas were tender, but in another twenty-four hours any hint of the wounds would be completely gone.

If he managed to survive twenty-four hours.

Max stood up and stretched, eyeing the windows with a sour expression. They could both feel that they had about two hours of sunlight to wait out.

Billy sat up with a tired yawn. When Max had come back and he'd been able to hold her tight again, he'd noticed the marks on her arms. They were gone now, fully healed, but he still remembered them. "What happened after I got away?" he softly asked.

"He attacked me and Nancy," Max growled out. "He didn't really bother Carol and Tommy. He went easy on Jonathan too, went on and on about him being a possible replacement for you."

"I thought he would kill you," Billy admitted.

"I think he was planning on it but there wasn't much nighttime left." A look of disgust and horror passed Max's face as she added, "He probably would have killed us tonight. It would have given him more time to savor it, to take his time. The fun he had with you took up most of his time."

“Well I guess he’ll still get his chance tonight,” sighed Billy. “Personally, I think we should make a break for it the moment the sun is down. No way do we have a shot.”

“But you agreed to help them. Jonathan’s mom said so!” Max yelled back. “They can help us!”

“Don’t tell me you believed that crap. Even if it is true, there’s a fifty/fifty chance of survival!”

Max jumped back onto the bed. “But it’s a chance! It is! I’m tired of living this way! I’m just so fucking tired!”

“Max...”

“No! That is the only word that gets across how I’m feeling.” She moved closer, grabbing hold of Billy’s hand. “I’ve tried. I’ve managed to live this way for months but...I just don’t want it anymore. I don’t!”

Billy rested his head against his hands and looked at Max’s angry face. For a moment, he thought about leaving her behind. But if he did that, he’d be alone. Everything he’d done, all that he’d risked and sacrificed for her would mean nothing. His life was meaningless enough as is. He didn’t want to make it worse.

“Whether or not we get a chance, we’ll die anyways,” sighed Billy. “I don’t care how many we have. We can’t fight all of them.”

“You mean just Neil.”

“But what about—”

“I guess I didn’t have time to mention it but Jonathan’s mom and I killed Tommy and Carol. We just have your father to worry about and with all of us working together...”

“Holy shit. You’re serious.”

Max nodded.

Silence spread over the room until Billy started to laugh.

“Try not to sound so pleased,” snorted Max.

Billy just laughed harder. “Fucking finally! God I wish I’d been there!”

“Dumped a bottle of holy water on Carol,” Max commented.

“Well the bitch deserved it. Thanks,” sighed Billy.

Max rolled her eyes. “I did it just as much for me as for you.”

“I’m sure,” Billy sarcastically mumbled

“And Jonathan’s mom knows her stuff! She took out Tommy with two bolts right to the heart. I mean, I helped with tearing off his arms and all but she’s a good shot!”

He had to admit, that was pretty good knowing that Max and the humans’ mom had somehow managed just fine but still... “If I left—”

“I’m staying and so are you. I don’t care if her spell works or not. We caused this family enough trouble. It’s the least we can do,” Max interrupted.

“I can’t convince you otherwise. Can I?”

“Billy, I...you’ve done a lot for me. The best you could do at times,” Max replied. “My life’s been longer because of it, even if it’s been a shit life. But I can’t just live forever. Not like this. We’ve just been pushing off that fact. Ignoring the inevitable.”

Billy’s head hit the wall as he fell backwards. He let out a long, mournful sigh, but he knew Max was right. The fact that he’d been unable to kill Steve was proof of that.

“We’re not abandoning them when the sun falls down,” pressed Max.

Billy’s shoulders sunk before he slowly nodded. “Yeah. Yeah I guess you’re right.”

“I always am.”

“Hmm...I’d say you’re right about fifty percent of the time.”

“Eighty percent.”

“Sixty.”

“Maybe,” snorted Max. “Seventy-five?”

“Hell no,” laughed Billy just as a knock was heard at the door. They turned and watched as Joyce walked in. That large book from before was in her arms again.

“Are you almost healed?” she asked with a concerned look.

“Pretty much,” Billy replied, feeling the scar tissue on his neck again. Max also looked at her now clear body.

“The boys have gone around town and gathered everything we need. They prepped more holy water and started barring the windows and doors too.”

“He’ll still find a way to get in,” Billy replied.

“I’m sure he will. But hopefully this way we can guide him in a specific direction.”

Billy cocked his head to the side. “Hmm, you lot are smarter than I was expecting. Alright, so how the hell do you plan on capturing him?”

“Assuming he comes in the way we’re expecting, myself and Nancy will manage to pin him against the wall. I have an extra crossbow for her. Then Jonathan and Steve can hopefully keep him there with holy water as a deterrent.”

“Wait, Nancy?” asked Billy. This woman was expecting little, avoided violence at all costs, unable to bite Jonathan, Nancy to be able to fire a crossbow? Max looked just as confused.

“You two have been asleep all day,” Joyce replied. “We’ve been working on the plan and it turns out she’s an excellent shot.”

“Huh, who would’ve thought,” muttered Billy.

“So, the real question is, will you still allow me to try and return you to a human?” Joyce asked.

“Yes,” Max immediately said. She elbowed Billy in the side. “You too. You’re not fucking bailing on me.”

Billy sighed at the language but murmured, “Well...I suppose we all got to die someday, right?”

“If it helps, I think I understand why it didn’t work the second time,” Joyce said. “The blood that was used in the ritual hadn’t been the leader of that vampire’s clan. At least that’s the only difference recorded in the book.”

“It doesn’t have to be like, the third day of a month with a full moon or some shit, right?” asked Billy.

“No, nothing like that. The spell itself appears fairly basic, if you can even call it a spell,” Joyce replied. She pulled open the book, allowing Billy and Max to get their first proper look at the pages. “You both must drain the head vampire’s blood within a single night and then kill him before he feeds again.”

“Wait,” said Max, “you mean just draining him won’t kill him? Is that a head vampire thing or...”

“Any vampire can survive without any blood in their system. The blood that keeps you going comes from the victims. You don’t produce it yourself like a human would,” Joyce responded.

Billy blinked at the new information. “I feel like I skipped vampire orientation day one-o-one or something.”

“Don’t feel to surprised. Many vampires don’t know many of the smaller details. There isn’t much point for them to know them anyways,” Joyce replied. Her eyes moved back to the book and she continued. “Now, if you do not drain him completely or if he manages to feed again then you will both remain as vampires and the first turned, you in this case Billy, will simply take the role of the head vampire should he be killed.”

“But assuming we were successful with draining him, what happens after we’ve killed him?”

“Then you must stand in the rising light of the following day,” Joyce finished. “It will hurt. I won’t lie to you about that, but what it does is it burns the virus out of your system.”

“And if we did something wrong?” asked Max.

“You’d be able to tell rather quickly. If done properly, you won’t see much of a physical reaction. It’ll be more internal.”

“How did your dad even figure out all this?” asked Billy. “It makes it sound like there had to be a ton of trial and error cases, not just too.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it. Even before he had me, he was rather obsessed over this kind of thing. Both him and my mother though she passed away early on,” Joyce replied. “However, these two instances were the only ones written down. So, even with all this information, is it a yes?”

Billy let out a soft sigh. There was a lot of room for things to go south. What if they couldn’t hold his father down? What if they couldn’t kill him? Even if it was all of them against him, there was still a chance he’d just kill them all. Yet he’d already spoken his agreement to it. He was going to die one day and if this didn’t work, then he’d finally die.

The fact that it was more appealing than living on like this truly sunk Billy’s heart. Maybe he should have tried harder in trying to kill himself when his father first turned him. He’d been too much of a coward then. Now it was less so. He still didn’t believe this would really work, the odds were just stacked against them. But he had to stand by Max in this. He missed having a life, a real one. He was tired of missing it too and seeing as he couldn’t truly immerse himself into the ways of a vampire, what was the point in living on?

He had to agree with Max. He was just so god damn tired of it all.

“Yeah, let’s do this,” Billy softly said. He glanced up only to suddenly be hit with a slap. Too shocked to respond, he just stared as Joyce



pointed a finger at him.

“That is for breaking my son’s neck,” Joyce said, her gaze steely and sure. “But I am still giving you a second chance. Do not make me regret it. And Max?” She turned to her and a tired smile spread across her lips. “Thank you for saving his life.”

“Yeah uh...I’m glad I did,” Max finally got out. She looked like she was stuck between silent shock and laughing out loud at Billy’s own stunned face.

“Rest if you can,” Joyce murmured, “I suspect this will be one hell of a night.”

Billy finally broke from his frozen gaze and gave a small nod. “Well if that isn’t the truth.”

“I’ll see you both downstairs soon,” Joyce replied before heading out the door.

The moment she was gone, Max did laugh out loud. “Holy hell. She’s awesome.”

An involuntary smile broke across Billy’s face. “I wonder...is that what a mother is supposed to be like?”

“I think so,” Max said, her own smile somewhat sad. “She’s certainly someone to look up to. Huh?”

“Yeah. I suppose it is a good thing you turned Jonathan.”

Max nodded, relaxing back on the bed and leaning against Billy. She let out a soft sigh and then slowly hugged Billy.

He almost asked why.

But after all they’d been through, the ups and downs, did he really need to? Just because she’d been more sure about helping Joyce didn’t mean she had any more confidence in the spell than Billy. For all they knew, this could be their last day together. Their last night.

“Sorry,” Billy softly said.

Max just leaned in closer, both closing their eyes if only for a moment.

---

Steve was exhausted. After so little sleep and all that running around, he felt like he could pass out for days. However, he didn't have that luxury. Right after coming back home, he'd run off for Joyce's errands, and then he'd had to put those tools to good use.

Now a head vampire would be coming straight for them with plans to probably eviscerate them all in just a few hours.

Christ, he couldn't wait for this to be over.

After the doors and windows were boarded up, Steve headed upstairs to change from his sweat and blood drenched clothes. He kind of expected that he'd soon be covered in the same stuff again but at least for a little while he could feel clean before the main fight.

Once upstairs at his door though, he remembered who was there. "Oh...sorry. Just have to grab some clothes real quick."

"What are you saying sorry for? It is your room," snorted Billy.

"Right—"

"How is Nancy?" asked Max.

"Good. Her and Jonathan woke up a little while ago." Steve looked away and wrung his hands. He'd still been caught up in just accepting everything as is when he'd spoken with Billy last. Now that he'd seen what vampires were actually capable of, he couldn't help but think of what Billy had done. He needed to address it and if this was their last night well...this was probably his last chance to talk about it. "You tried to kill Jonathan."

"I did," Billy replied. "We've been over this already though, right?"

"Sort of but it's just...even if you become human again, it's in your blood right? Killing?" Steve hesitantly asked. "Will you be able to just stop?"

Max bristled but Billy held a hand up to keep her back. "Listen," Billy said, "if someone ever tries to rob me in an alleyway, let's just say they're going to end up having a bad fucking night. And yeah, I enjoy it. At least that's what I've told myself over and over again just so I can fucking stomach it. But that's counterintuitive isn't it? Saying you enjoy something just so you can ignore it. That doesn't really change that you don't want to stomach it right? And if this spell your mom has works, I don't need to do it anymore to survive and that's always been the main reason I've ever forced myself to enjoy it. Survival. And if I'm going to have to join the real world again, well the last thing humans smile upon is murder, isn't it?"

"Most places yeah, but according to this city's slogan, it's all too common here," snorted Steve. He scratched the back of his neck, sheepishly looking away. "Sorry, asking all that that was kind of insensitive."

"It was," grumbled Max.

Billy rolled his eyes. "But not exactly wrong. We have had to make it a norm in our life and this city's reputation definitely made it easier."

"But you didn't kill me. I guess I should remember that too," sighed Steve. "Sorry."

Billy shrugged in response. "Gotta acknowledge it all, right? Good and the bad? Besides, your mom's been really kind, even considering that slap she got in."

"Wait-Joyce slapped you!"

"I did break Jonathan's neck," Billy said with a roll of his eyes. "I'm just grateful your mom didn't wring mine."

"It was pretty funny," Max added.

"God, you're such an asshole," snorted Billy. He got out of bed and stretched as Steve walked over to the closet and grabbed a change of clothes. However, Steve noted the feeling of Billy and Max coming closer and he turned to them in confusion.

"So don't freak out too much..." Billy slowly said, "but if we're going

up against my dad, I'm going to need to be as strong as possible and I did get my intestines ripped out."

"Well, I get the needing to be strong part but what does that have to do with your intestines?" Steve slowly said. One look at Max seemed to tell him that she understood what was going on. The look, a mixture of acceptance and tired amusement, on her face told Steve that he shouldn't worry even if it only confused him more. He looked back to Billy.

"Ok, cool," Billy said. "Glad you agree."

"Wait-ow! Hey-ow! God damn it!"

"Phew! Thanks for that," sighed Billy as he moved back.

"Seriously! That-wait. So you don't have to like, drain the person all the way?" asked Steve as he held his bleeding arm close.

"Difficult to avoid and it's not like my father would allow people to just exist knowing about us," Billy muttered as he wiped at his mouth. He felt at his neck, the scar tissue now completely gone. "Good as new."

"At least you controlled yourself," snorted Max.

Steve blinked in shock, staring at the area where Billy's scar had once been. "Woah that-that healed right in front of my eyes!"

"Our healing factor is quick but blood can practically double it," Billy said, just as Will came running into the room.

"I heard yelling-Steve!" The kids eyes went wide, staring at Steve's still bleeding arm before turning to Billy with a glare.

"What? I was thirsty."

Steve let out a slight groan as Max walked over.

"Don't worry. He just needed to speed along the healing process real quick," she said. Will took a step back but Max just stepped closer and slapped an arm around his shoulders. "Don't worry. I'm good

enough.”

“R-r-r-right,” Will stuttered.

“I’m going to go clean up,” sighed Steve. “Before anyone else thinks about taking a bite out of me.”

Billy laughed, the noise both infuriating and yet strangely amusing. Steve simply held his wound tight and went to the restroom with a change of clothes still tucked under his arm.

Once in the restroom, he got a better look at the wound, noting how it looked just like a bite mark and not something stereotypical like two holes from pointed fangs. He washed it out and then grabbed some gauze to pull over it just as Jonathan came in. He’d helped out with the prepping of the house but around noon he’d just gotten weaker and weaker, like he could feel the high point of the sun coming upon them.

Jonathan had been asleep since then but he looked better now.

Steve looked at his bandaged arm. “You’re not going to try and take a bite out of me too, are you?”

A tired sigh escaped Jonathan’s lips. “I’m assuming Billy did that.”

“Did Will tell you?”

He nodded.

“Yeah. It wasn’t exactly appreciated,” groaned Steve. “Still, it’s not so bad. I’m surprised Joyce didn’t come running upstairs.”

“Mom’s been double checking everything outside,” Jonathan replied. “I’m pretty sure she would have come running and shoved Billy out the window if she’d heard.”

“Well, he still didn’t kill me,” sighed Steve. He watched the blood as it slowly showed itself beneath the white. A thought occurred to him and despite Jonathan’s words, Steve was curious. “Does it bother you?”

"No. But I think it's just because I haven't been turned for long enough," Jonathan replied. "It bothered Nancy though. She could smell it before Will even came down and told me what had happened."

"Just promise me your girlfriend isn't going to try and eat me," laughed Steve as a blush immediately blossomed over Jonathan's cheeks.

"She's not—"

"Oh come on. We could all be killed by a crazy ass vampire tonight. You might as well just admit it," Steve replied. "Besides, from what I've heard, she did all she could to try and protect you. How could you not fall in love with that?"

Jonathan blushed again and Steve gave him a playful nudge. "Go talk to her before we have to deal with the crazy, huh?"

"That actually sounds like some good advice," murmured Jonathan with a small smile. "Maybe I will."

Steve grinned at that. He knew Jonathan wasn't the most forward person so it was hard not to smile about this, even with impending doom coming down on them. Jonathan left to talk to Nancy and Steve finally changed into the fresh clothes. He was surprised to find Billy out in the hallway but the space he was standing in didn't have any sunlight reaching it. His clothes were still covered in his own blood but despite that and the paleness of his skin, it was obvious he felt better.

"What's the sunlight like downstairs?" he asked.

"We've boarded up just about everything. We have the lights on because it's so dark. Why?"

"Wanted to get a feel for the place before all hell breaks loose. Where is your mother trying to guide him?"

"Through the chimney. It was the only place we couldn't easily close off."

"Hmm...it'll be easy enough for him to get through there. He probably would have gone through their first anyways," murmured Billy. "Not bad."

He headed downstairs, Steve following him as he watched Billy examine their handiwork. As he walked around, Billy was careful to avoid the spots of clear sunlight. There was silence for a while until the front door opened and Joyce quickly came in.

"Everything's done outside-Billy!"

Steve found he had to keep himself from laughing as Joyce's eyes moved from his bandaged arm to Billy where she shot him with a classic parental glare of disapproval.

Billy held his hands up in defense. "Hey! It's nothing irreparable! I just needed a boost for the fight tonight."

Joyce placed a hand over her face before slowly turning to Steve. "Are you alright sweetheart?"

"Yeah, it's not as bad as you might think," Steve smiled. "I'm sure it'll be fine in no time."

Joyce let out another tired sigh before moving towards the kitchen. "Well, we have a little less than an hour left. We should sit down and eat to keep our strength up. Go get the other boys Steve."

He nodded, quickly heading back upstairs and dragging everyone downstairs, including Nancy and Max. It was weird watching Joyce set out a quick meal for everyone, both humans and vampires.

"I know it doesn't provide as much sustenance for you as blood but it's something at least," Joyce kindly said. Billy, Max, and Nancy looked among each other, confusion clouding their faces. "Don't think I'm not including you lot to. Sit. And Billy, do not bite any of my other children please."

Strangely enough, Billy actually looked a bit sheepish though Steve supposed that was because Joyce was using her mom voice again and was so good at it too.

They all sat together, Joyce immediately starting up by going over the plan again. Steve was meant to protect Will and keep him out of the way. He didn't like being basically the last line of defense but Jonathan was already a bit stronger than him and if he got hit, he'd heal quicker too, same went for Nancy. Joyce may have been human but she had the training that Steve lacked and was probably the only one that fully knew what she was doing. Billy and Max had to drain their dad so no way could they just stand back and watch.

Once Neil was drained and they killed him, Jonathan and Nancy should immediately return to normal. At least there wasn't some weird ritual that they had to go through to help them.

By the time Joyce was finished reinforcing the plan, they were almost finished with dinner and the sun was almost gone from the sky. Steve, Jonathan, and Will immediately went about grabbing the bowls and plates. If the fight moved to other rooms, cleaning up now would just be pointless but doing something normal helped calm Steve down a bit.

Besides, it could be the last normal thing he ever got to do.

Steve faltered at the noise he heard though and he could tell Will and Jonathan were just as shocked. The vampires were still sitting at the table, all in different states of being upset. Billy stared at Nancy and she back at him, both their shoulders shaking. Some sort of understanding was passing between them, like they'd both discovered something new about the other and yet familiar to themselves.

Steve wasn't sure if he'd get an answer to what that was but Max unexpectedly answered his silent question.

"It's-it's been so long-so long since I've had-had a family dinner," Max managed to get out as she wiped away her tears.

Of course...Steve didn't know anything about Nancy's past life and he only knew about Billy's father, not his mother or whoever brought him up. But despite Neil's attempts at creating his own family, it was obvious that he'd failed at creating that heart. They weren't used to this kind of hospitality.



Joyce moved forward, her motherly instinct pushing her to comfort them but Billy stood up. His movement broke the spell and he wiped at his eyes, his face covered if only for a second. His shoulders shuttered again but as his hand slipped away, a hardness settled in his eyes.

“Let’s finish this bastard.”

It seemed the time had come.

Steve rushed for the machete that he’d had before and everyone else quickly grabbed hold of their own weapons. Billy carefully handled a bottle of holy water but otherwise he and Max kept their hands empty. Seconds ticked by as the sun finally disappeared and the only light in the house came from bulbs.

Grabbing Will, Steve hurried towards the stairs, knowing that the best they could do was stay out of the way. At least that was the plan until an explosion occurred and both Will and Steve were thrown to the side as a cloud of soot filled the air.

---

“Now!” yelled Billy.

Nancy could already detect his movement and it seemed Joyce was as good as Max had told him. He felt the bolts fly by him. Just as the cries happened, Billy threw himself forward, Max at his side. Billy slammed into his father, shoving him against the bricks of the fireplace. Bolts were fired again, pinning Neil there and Billy didn’t waste time to reveal his bangs and bite down on him.

“You fucking brats!”

Billy bit back any responses. There would be time for that when the guy was already dead.

The blood that filled Billy’s mouth was rancid. It was like trying to swallow hand sanitizer but he forced himself to keep going. He felt the sudden force of power underneath his arms however. Max was knocked back and Neil forced his right shoulder out of the bolts there. Blood flew as Neil’s free arm came up and grabbed Billy by the

throat.

Shit!

Neil forced himself off the wall and the remaining bolts, slamming Billy up into the ceiling. They plummeted to the ground again as another bolt struck one of Neil's knees. Steve was the closest, grabbing the machete again and swinging it down. Even with the wounds and loss of blood though, Neil was fast enough to reach up and grab hold of the machete's blade.

"So you've paired up with some worthless humans?! How low you've come!"

The machete was ripped from Steve's hand and tossed to the side but before Neil could grab him, Max got in between them. Her teeth sunk into his hand, breaking through the flesh and bones until the fingers snapped off.

"You fucking mistake!"

Billy took advantage of the distraction however, grabbing hold of that bottle and popping off the top. Holy water sprinkled against his skin, welts appearing and burning. He ignored the pain and threw the liquid straight into his father's face. The backslash continued to tear at his own skin but most of the damage got inflicted on his father. Hair fell apart and skin melted onto the ground and against himself. He was pretty sure the scream that escaped Neil's throat was built out of actual words and insults but Billy couldn't really understand him or care.

He slammed his knee into Neil's stomach, shoving him off just as Jonathan appeared behind him with Steve's weapon in hand. He slashed down and across Neil's back just as Nancy and Joyce pushed forward between all the confusion, bolts reloaded. They fired into his skin once more. Billy jumped up and slammed Neil against the far wall for the second time.

Max grabbed hold of him, teeth elongating and sinking into his flesh again. A small part of Billy wondered if all this blood loss would screw with their chances, if they wouldn't be able to swallow the

amount of blood they needed. However, whatever the outcome was, Billy finally felt true power filling his veins. For the first time, Billy felt like he had even a smidge of control over his father.

Billy and Max held him down, blood dripping from their teeth and lips. Neil's face was melted away, his own skull showing through in several parts with bits of muscle and flesh here and there. Even with that kind of injury he continued to push back though. He struck Billy in the side but Steve was there to retaliate with his own strike, giving Billy time to latch on and push him back again.

Billy fed as quickly as he could even though the taste hurt his stomach. Out of the corner of his eyes, he could see his father's remaining skin tightening and bunching up. He swallowed until he took a huge gulp and found nothing more coming up. He looked and saw one shriveled eye and an empty socket staring at him. He could see his dad's brain underneath the skull, still twitching and alive despite how no more blood dripped from his wounds.

Neil opened his mouth but Billy grabbed hold of the bottom and lower jaw. "You don't deserve any final words," growled Billy and with one final shout, he pulled as hard as he could, snapping his father's skull in half. He fell back against the floor, his entire body heaving with the effort as he continued to keep the taste of his father's blood down.

Silence spread over the room except for everyone's heavy breathing.

"It's...over?"

That was Will. So the kid hadn't gotten caught up in the crossfire. That was good. Billy finally turned and looked around. The dust from the fireplace had fully cleared and the damage and blood across the place was now clear for all to see.

"That feeling..." Jonathan murmured. "It's—"

"It's gone! I'm normal! I'm human!" Nancy cried out. Tears fell down her face as Jonathan quickly hugged her. She shook as the tears of joy continued.

Steve and Joyce were standing too. Steve was a little banged up but still perfectly fine and Joyce was only now dropping the crossbow in her hands.

The floor was torn up, the couch torn apart and slammed against the wall. A vase had shattered and other small pieces littered the ground. The fireplace was utterly ripped apart, the bricks scattered and black soot clearly covered everything. Above them was a crack in the ceiling from when Neil had slammed Billy against it and the stairs were partially damaged too. When Neil had first come through, the windows and one of the bulbs had shattered, the shards mixing with everything else. Yet all in all, it could have been a lot worse.

"It's over," sighed Steve. "Finally."

Joyce shook her head. "Not quiet."

Billy and Max both stood up and looked at each other before turning to Joyce.

"I guess we'll see you in the morning. One way or another," Billy sighed. Everyone's faces softened, even Nancy's and Billy quickly looked away. "Don't be showing us pity yet. At least wait until the outcome. Right?"

"That sounds fair enough," murmured Joyce. "Do you need anything?"

"We're good," Max quickly replied, her voice curt but not unkind. She repeated Billy's words. "See you in the morning."

She headed out first and Billy followed. If he survived the morning, he'd help them clean up but for now he just needed these last few hours of quiet.

He sat down on the front porch and Max sat beside him. For a moment, Billy just listened to the crickets and the night wind. The last lonely night and soon to be the first morning he'd experienced in so long. He still didn't believe things would work out for them but on the small chance that things did...

"I understand if you don't want anything to do with me," Billy softly

whispered. He waited until Max looked over and then added, “But if we become human...well then you...well if you need—”

“I don’t have anyone. If that’s what you’re asking,” Max said. “But you already knew that. What about you? You’ve never told me that.”

“I...no. My mom left when I was young. Not as young as my dad but... My grandparents raised me but they were gone by the time dad came knocking,” Billy softly admitted. “I don’t have anyone left.”

“Yeah, well me neither,” Max sighed, “and it’s going to be fucking hard to get accustomed to normal life anyways. Might as well deal with it alongside someone who’ll be just as lost as me.”

Billy rolled his eyes. “Stop cursing so much and you’ve got yourself a deal.”

“Hell no!”

“God I’ve been such a bad fucking influence,” Billy groaned as he patted her head before leaning back and looking up at the sky. “But fine, just tone it down a bit. Will you?”

“Fine,” grumbled Max.

They turned back to silence, seconds turning to minutes and then hours. The others never interrupted them. It was a small kindness. Billy didn’t want his mind to be filled with second thoughts and uncertainties.

The wind blew just a little stronger and Billy could feel the coming sun.

“If this works,” whispered Max, “thanks for saving me. And...and even if it doesn’t...thanks for being by my side.”

Billy ruffled her hair again for possibly the last time. And seeing as he’d likely die, he decided he might as well be honest too. “Thanks for keeping the human part of me alive,” Billy whispered back.

The stars faded from up above as the sky turned from black to dark blue and still lighter. Billy looked down at his hands before slowly

closing his eyes. Here came the sun.

---

Steve let out a tired sigh. Five days of hard work and they still had so much ahead of them. At least the floor had been completely re-paneled by now, and the ceiling patched up against any rain. Getting the soot out from all the corners of the room had been a lot harder and the fireplace was still a mess. They weren't sure whether to keep it or throw all the loose bricks out and just cover up the area.

He walked outside, the sun bearing down on the land but the cool breeze made it a welcomed break from the heat inside. Joyce was in the kitchen whipping up something for them and Jonathan was still finishing up his spot, but everyone else was outside. Steve walked over to a patch of the old farmland where they'd dragged an old table out, now surrounded with a set of random chairs.

It looked like they had just started a game of cards and Steve could help but laugh as he looked at Billy, Nancy, and Max. "You three look like god damn cats preening in the sun."

Nancy shyly looked away with a small smile as Billy and Max shot equally fierce glares at Steve.

"Excuse you. I may not have my fangs anymore but I still have a mean bite," Billy growled back.

"Alright, alright, I won't test you," laughed Steve as he sat down beside them. He gestured at his arm. "I remember the last time well enough and I don't think the marks are going away anytime soon."

Billy did look somewhat abashed for that. However, his moment of shyness quickly fell away and a large grin broke out across Billy's face. "Just think of it as a love bite!"

"What!"

Billy burst into laughter just as Max hit him upside the head and Will and Nancy snorted into their hands.

"God, so being an ass wasn't just a side effect of being a vampire?" groaned Steve.

“Afraid not,” Max said with a roll of her eyes.

“Excuse you. I’m a delight.”

Nancy shot him a glare. “Come on Billy. It’s not nice to lie.”

Billy grumbled something unintelligible and they all laughed again. A cloud moved overhead and Billy looked forlornly upwards.

“You know,” said Steve, “the great thing about the sun is that it’s kind of always there and it does always comes back.”

“And you all are calling me the asshole! Alright, I see how it is!” Billy yelled as he leaned back and threw a rock at Steve.

Steve just laughed all the more though, finally sitting down just as Jonathan and Joyce came out with snacks and drinks in hand.

“I hope you haven’t started a game without us,” Joyce smiled.

“We were only just starting,” Max replied, grabbing all the cards again and reshuffling them. Joyce and Jonathan sat down, the table now full as a plate of cookies was passed around and lemonade was poured on the bright, sunny day.

For the most part, they teased and laughed and played the simple card game. However, after their third time playing, Max put the cards away and Billy said something that had the mood momentarily turning serious.

“If this was a movie, I feel like it would have ended days ago,” sighed Billy. “Probably on a funny quip or something. The characters certainly wouldn’t have to deal with all the aftermath.”

“Well, that’s what life is, isn’t it? You deal with the aftermath after aftermath after aftermath,” murmured Joyce.

“Yeah,” sighed Billy. “I suppose that’s true. But in that case I guess I should just go ahead and say no thanks to going back to school.”

“Billy,” murmured Joyce. “I told you—”

“That your friend can help. Yeah I know. And I want to make sure Max gets back into school—”

“Hey!”

“You’re only thirteen. You still have time to learn a thing or two from it,” Billy quickly interrupted. “Me though? It’s just too late for it to matter. I’ll get a job or something.”

It had been an argument they’d been going back and forth on for a bit, Joyce and Billy having differing opinions on his schooling though they both agreed Max should go back. Joyce’s childhood friend, Hopper, was supposed to come down at some point and help get her a new identity since returning to her old one would be too difficult.

Nevertheless, that wasn’t the only good thing that Joyce’s friend was being called down for and Nancy softly asked, “What about...”

“Don’t worry,” Joyce quickly said. “He’s working on tracking down where your family moved to. If anyone can find them, it’s him.”

“Thank you,” Nancy quickly said.

“And for the time being, you’re obviously going to stay here with us,” Joyce smiled. “I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

“Thank you,” murmured Nancy, “for allowing me this second life.”

It was a sweet moment. At least until Billy opened his mouth.

“Even so,” Billy groaned. “You have to think about so many other things that were once so insignificant. And I mean, I never really worried about other vampires but now I can’t exactly go toe to toe with them. And shit! If vampires and vampire hunters are real then what the hell else is out there? And now fucking knocking my toe into something hurts like shit and can leave a bruise for days and just-argh! Living is so tiresome!”

“You mean like this?” grinned Max, mercilessly elbowing him in the side much to everyone’s amusement.

“Ow! I swear, you’ve retained at least half your fucking strength,”



Billy groaned as he rubbed his side.

“Or maybe you were always a wimpy human.”

“God you’re such a brat!”

Steve couldn’t hide the laughter escaping his lips as Billy began to tickle her and Max kicked at him, not holding anything back.

“Hey!” Will desperately yelled out as they kept bumping against the table. He reached over and tried to still all the glasses, quickly getting help from everyone else.

“You got to admit,” Steve slowly said as the messing about calmed down, “it may be hard but that makes life doubly interesting. Doesn’t it?”

“Well I guess when you put it like that,” sighed Billy. “God, I wouldn’t have guessed you for a sap.”

“You did only know me from those two bump-ins on the boardwalk,” snorted Steve.

“True and I’d say the same goes for you but from what I remember, you watched me like a hawk. Stalker,” Billy grinned from ear to ear as he leaned over.

“No I didn’t!”

“I could feel your eyes too,” Max quickly added. “Total stalker.”

“What! No—”

“Steve, sweetheart, what have we talked about when it comes to staring?” chuckled Joyce.

“Argh, you’re supposed to be on my side at least!” Steve moaned.

Everyone else just continued to laugh, the cloud from overhead finally moving out of the way and revealing the sun from above.